

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
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Collaboratory, Coronavirus and the Colonial Countryside

Howard Williams

Introducing the second volume of the Offa's Dyke Journal (ODJ), this five-part article sets the scene by reviewing: (i) key recent research augmenting last year's Introduction (Williams and Delaney 2019); (ii) the key activities of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory in 2020; (iii) the political mobilisation of Offa's Dyke in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns; (iv) the ramifications of accelerated efforts to decolonise the British countryside on both archaeological research and heritage interpretation on linear monuments; and (v) a review of the contents of volume 2. Together, this introduction presents the context and significance of ODJ volume 2 for both research on the Welsh Marches and broader investigations of frontiers and borderlands.

Keywords: archaeology, borderlands, colonialism, coronavirus, frontiers, linear earthworks

Introduction

As the first and only open-access peer-reviewed academic journal about the landscapes, monuments and material culture of frontiers and borderlands in deep-time historical perspective, the *Offa's Dyke Journal (ODJ)* has a concerted focus on the Anglo-Welsh borderlands given its sponsorship from the University of Chester and the Offa's Dyke Association in support of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory (Williams and Delaney 2019). Yet *ODJ* also provides a venue for original research on frontiers and borderlands in broader and comparative perspective. While Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke remain key foci, the contents of volumes 1 and 2 together illustrate the wider themes, debates and investigations encapsulated by *ODJ* concerning boundaries and barriers, edges and peripheries, from prehistory through to recent times, as well as considerations of the public archaeology and heritage of frontiers and borderlands.

Before discussing the six articles in *ODJ* 2, recent new work on linear monuments, frontiers and borderlands is reviewed, and then the specific activities of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory during 2020 is surveyed. Next, the article explores both the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns on the politicised rhetoric surrounding Offa's Dyke, and the implications of the Black Lives Matter movement on ongoing discussions of the British colonial countryside. As well as shaping and structuring the activities of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory in this unprecedented year, the dual themes of coronavirus and decolonisation promise to shift debates regarding the present-day significance of ancient frontier works. I conclude by showing how the articles published in *ODJ* 2, in multiple fashions, herald such endeavours.

Recent publications

The introduction to *ODJ* 1 reviewed recent work on frontiers and borderlands (Williams and Delaney 2019). This section reviews recent literature missed last year and relevant new publications from 2020.

One recent survey omitted from last year's review was Peter Spring's (2015) *Great Walls and Linear Barriers*. This is a bold venture exploring the often scant evidence for linear monuments from across Eurasia. It contains a discussion of the more prominent later prehistoric and early medieval linear monuments of Ireland and Britain and promotes a military thesis for understanding their creation and use.

In the context of the articles in this volume (especially Bell and Malim), Tom Moore's recent discussions of late Iron Age *oppida* and other 'polyfocal' or 'networked' sites deserves recognition. He considers these clusters of sites as 'landscape monuments', incorporating banjo enclosures and dyke systems and socio-political, economic and ceremonial gathering places. His multi-scalar approach has considerable potential to inform our understanding of linear earthworks of both later prehistoric and early medieval date as monumental strategies for managing and manipulating landscapes. Moore considers linear monuments in this context as serving to funnel people, animals and resources across landscape interfaces rather than operating as territorial boundaries (Moore 2012, 2017).

Also of direct relevance to our discussions is recent analyses into Roman-period frontier works. For example, a novel application of LiDAR data, taking it beyond visualisation and site prospection, is implemented in a high-resolution metric survey, evaluating the projected extent of the mid-second-century AD Antonine Wall in relation to its famed distance-slabs (Hannon *et al.* 2017). Symonds (2020) conducts an evaluation of the development of Hadrian's Wall by considering historic fording places. Moreover, Symonds iterates the significance for understanding seemingly static frontiers in terms of transforming and controlling mobilities in the landscape (see also Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017).

For early medieval linear earthworks, Nigel Jones' (2018) report on recent excavations along the course of the Whitford Dyke concluding that, while still undated, it remains disconnected from Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke (see also Hill this volume). The principal investigation of early medieval linear monuments published since *ODJ* 1 is Tim Malim's (2020) consideration of Wat's Dyke around Old Oswestry. Reviewing previous work, Malim hints at the possibility that Wat's Dyke, incorporating Old Oswestry hillfort at a key node in prehistoric routeways, might have enshrined an older line of significance in the prehistoric landscape implied through association with at least three standing stones (Malim 2020: 153–157). Again, as with the work of Moore and Symonds, we are prompted to consider the broader connections of linear earthworks to the manipulation and reconfiguration of past mobilities.

Just as historic routes provide an inspiration for understanding the design and utility of Hadrian's Wall (Symonds 2020), so do contemporary paths inform the interpretation of a new study of Chinggis Khan's Wall. Deploying high-resolution satellite imagery, Shelach-Lavi *et al.* (2020) explore this 737km-long wall spanning the steppes of modern Mongolia, Russia and China and identify a series of rectangular and circular structures in clusters situated at regular intervals along its line. Rather than lookout points, these auxiliary structures were located in association with water sources and present-day paths. Built to bisect the lowlands between two mountain ranges, most likely by the medieval Liao dynasty, they infer that the wall was not a border or military defensive work but was constructed and garrisoned to monitor and control the movements of pastoral nomadic groups. Together, these studies reveal valuable new methodological approaches and insights gained from investigating the landscape contexts of linear monuments.

Yet linear earthworks were clearly only one strategy for iterating and consolidating socio-economic, territorial and military arrangements. Reynolds extends his earlier work exploring the significance of Anglo-Saxon execution graves by providing a fresh interpretation of graves at Werg near Mildenhall (Wiltshire), close to the ruins of the former Roman town of *Cventio*. Looking to the wider landscape, he suggests that the Kennet valley was part of a late eighth-century contested frontier between Wessex and Mercia (i.e. contemporary with Offa's Dyke). He argues that Wansdyke and Offa's Dyke were each named after imagined ancestors of the respective West Saxon and Mercian royal houses to bolster their legitimacy and efficacy in the landscape (Reynolds 2020: 265; see also Seaman 2019). Notably, Reynolds indicates a late eighth-century strategy of granting land to powerful and loyal kin in this frontier zone as a means of socially and politically fortifying contested territory alongside dyke-building. Execution sites, charters and dyke-building are thus all material dimensions and territorial expressions of the evolving judicial and military authority of Anglo-Saxon kings.

Another new and significant study relating to early medieval engineering has ramifications for understanding linear earthworks. Werther *et al.* (2020) explore the archaeological and historical evidence for Charlemagne's failed attempt at building a canal ('big ditch') linking the Rhine and Danube, arguing that this hydraulic work was inspired by the writings of Vitruvius. They report on archaeological investigations which reveal from dendrochronological dating that the canal was commissioned in AD792 with work beginning in the spring of AD793 and abandoned later that same year. This work has implications for understanding the speed and scale of early medieval engineering projects and the potential for further careful study of how linear earthworks interacted with, and manipulated, water courses. The methodological implications for the potential dating of linear earthworks in locations where waterlogged remains might be preserved is also apparent.

Offa's Dyke features in a recent survey of fifty 'things' which serves as a valuable introduction to students and general readers for early medieval Europe's material cultures

and monuments (Deliyannis *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, setting linear earthworks in a longer-term and broader context, Lindy Brady (2017), *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England*, deserves mention. Brady provides valuable literary perspective to the biography of the Welsh borderlands as a 'distinctive territory' of both conflict and peaceful interactions between peoples from the seventh to the eleventh centuries AD (Brady 2017: 168).

In addition to these recent works that feature frontiers and linear earthworks, it is important to reiterate the persistent neglect of linear earthworks in syntheses of early medieval history and archaeology. The most recent example in this tradition is Martin Carver's (2019) *Formative Britain: An Archaeology of Britain, Fifth to Eleventh Centuries*. Despite 140 pages dedicated to 'monumentality' as part of this far-ranging and distinctive archaeological survey, dykes are completely absent from the interpretation of the societies and landscapes of early medieval Britain, illustrating the need for ongoing detailed analyses but also new syntheses in later prehistoric and early historic archaeologies which incorporate them into discussions of not only military activity, but also landscape and society (see also Grigg 2018; Williams and Delaney 2019; Bell this volume).

Frontiers are not merely a challenge for how they are interpreted in the human past, but also their effects today. Therefore, these new studies of past frontiers are complemented by research on contemporary walls and barriers from the perspective of refugees and those living in their shadow over the longer term. Two key books have been published recently which are deserving of note, although neither fully integrates contemporary archaeologies with past linear monument constructions and uses (Hicks and Mallet 2019; McAttackney and McGuire 2020).

Contemporary administrative and political barriers can divide archaeological organisations and communities and their research into past frontiers. Regarding the archaeological professional and heritage sector themselves, Paul Belford (2020) focuses on the complex and fragmented ecosystems within which archaeology and cultural heritage which operate in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, showing how administrative boundaries hinder rather than help archaeological understandings and practices at every turn. To combat this, he proposes a multi-agency cross-border initiative to foster and support what he argues is a 'cultural coherence' and ambiguity of the borderlands. Similar challenges face heritage agencies and organisations worldwide and combatting the imposition and back-projection of contemporary political and administrative divides onto the human past is a constant challenge.

This leads to a consideration of how public archaeology is conducted within present-day borderlands and interpret past frontiers and linear monuments. For the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, two publications deserve specific note. First, there is the recent collection of studies on *Old Oswestry Hillfort and its Landscape* (Malim and Nash 2020) which also considers Wat's Dyke as a component of both protests against housing development in the proximity of the hillfort, and as a further element of the rich heritage of north-

west Shropshire incorporated in the creation of a heritage ‘hub’ with archaeological, historical, heritage and natural conservation dimensions (Clarke *et al.* 2020; see also McMillan-Sloan and Williams 2020).

Finally, the publication of the proceedings of a conference organised, in part, under the auspices of the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory, explores *Public Archaeologies of Frontiers and Borderlands* (Gleave *et al.* 2020). This first-ever collection dedicated to the public archaeology of past, present and fictional frontiers and borders, the collection includes multiple investigations of linear monuments worldwide as well as in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands. For example, Ray (2020 – see below) reviews the public archaeology of Offa’s Dyke, while further studies explore Wat’s Dyke’s heritage interpretation (Williams 2020a) and new initiatives for public engagement along its line (Swogger and Williams 2020). The power of walls in contemporary perceptions of frontiers is underpinned by reflections on fictional frontier works in this collection too.

Drawing this literature together, we can see that across periods and regions, there are innovative new thinking and methodological approaches to frontiers and borderlands, including their linear monuments, drawing upon expertise from across disciplines. In particular, taking landscape perspectives and incorporating fresh methodologies, studies are moving beyond either purely military or symbolic approaches to linear earthworks. Moreover, it is clear that the ODJ is part of a broader conversation linked to the legacies and traces of linear monuments in the contemporary world.

The Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory in 2020

The Research and Conservation Forum, 22 January 2020

The Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory is now operating effectively to facilitate new conversations and research on linear monuments in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands and beyond. There were three principal public events organised by, and one significance conference involving the participation of, multiple convenors and members of the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory during 2020. In this section we also want to note a new significant research project investigating linear monuments.

The first Collaboratory event of 2020 took place at Cardiff University, organised by Professor Keith Ray. Eighty heritage professionals and academics were invited to discuss future directions in the investigation, conservation and management of Offa’s Dyke, Wat’s Dyke and their related short dykes in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands. Opened by eminent early medieval archaeologist Dr Alan Lane (Figure 1a), the event comprised of presentations by convenors and members of the Collaboratory, including talks by local groups offering new insights regarding the line and significance of Offa’s Dyke in Flintshire and in Gloucestershire (Figure 1b). Among other talks, Professor Andrew Reynolds of UCL introduced a brand-new Leverhulme Trust-funded project



Figure 1: Four images from the Cardiff University Research and Conservation Forum, 22 January 2020. (a) top-left: Dr Alan Lane introducing the day; (b) top-right: Ray Bailey presenting about the northern stretches of Offa's Dyke; (c) below-left: David McGlade revealing the new art commissioned by the Offa's Dyke Association (see also front cover); (d) below-right: Ian Mckay discussing CoSMM (Photographs: Howard Williams, 2020)

(see below), Offa's Dyke Association chairman Dave McGlade addressed conservation issues for Offa's Dyke (Figure 1c) and Ian Mackay presented about the Community Stewardship of Mercian Monuments (CoSMM) initiative (Figure 1d). The event was closed with a discussion which flagged up the need for our work to be responsible and have integrity, in order to guard against extremist and political appropriations of the past. The more archaeologists and heritage professionals raise awareness of these ancient frontier works and borderlands, the more our expertise can be applied to effectively combat false narratives (see also Williams *et al.* 2020).

Special Offa, 4 April 2020

Complementing the Cardiff event which had been aimed at heritage professionals and academics, a public conference was planned for 4 April 2020 on the theme 'Special Offa: Communities and Offa's Dyke'. It was organised together with Pauline Clarke (doctoral researcher, University of Chester) and Andy Heaton of the Trefonen Rural Protection Group. The schedule of a morning of talks by academics, heritage experts

and local enthusiasts was to be followed by a guided walk along Offa's Dyke in and around Trefonen, Shropshire. The aim of the day was to explore different relationships between communities and Offa's Dyke, past and present, from a range of perspectives and showcasing the latest research and thinking. The choice of Trefonen was not arbitrary: the village sits on Offa's Dyke and has many local groups working hard to promote and bring benefit to the local area's history and heritage.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sadly the talks in



Figure 2: the advertisement for the digital Special Offa event by Archaeosoup Productions



Figure 3: looking north along Offa's Dyke north of Trefonen (point 12 on the map in Figure 5)
(Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 4: Howard Williams filming the Special Offa Tragical History Tour (Photograph: Kara Critchell, 2020)

the Village Hall and the walk along Offa's Dyke had to be reconsidered. Rather than cancel or postpone the event completely, it was decided to 'go digital' (Figure 2). To this end, *Special Offa* became perhaps the first public archaeology and heritage event to be delivered virtually during the 2020 pandemic lockdowns in the UK. Every confirmed speaker generously agreed to present via digital media, but the virtual format provided the opportunity of inviting many additional contributions. The results were presented via the Collaboratory's blog, and disseminated further via posts on the Collaboratory's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Furthermore, I created a YouTube playlist of the video contributions which included a video launching this second volume of the journal coinciding with the publication online of the first article (Malim).¹ Moreover, the Trefonen Tragical History Tour of Offa's Dyke went ahead digitally as a series of videos posted on YouTube at points along Offa's Dyke and the Offa's Dyke Path within and around the village, including a well-preserved stretch of

Offa's Dyke to Trefonen's north (Figures 3 and 4). This virtual tour was supported by a map of the locations where the videos were shot (Figure 5).² Wrapping up the day, Archaeology Soup's YouTube channel hosted a special live event linked to the Special Offa conference (Figure 6).³

The result is that, despite the short notice, the extra work for all involved, and many additional technical challenges related to delivering this event during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the Special Offa free public conference was a distinctive and experimental public-facing virtual showcase, with videos attracting from c. 100–450 views. As well as a legacy of digital resources for those wishing to learn more about Wat's Dyke, Offa's Dyke, and the landscapes of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, Special Offa provided a viable template for future public events in Wales and elsewhere. A full round-up of the event collated posts from various social media platforms (Williams 2020b).

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xyNjhfgWCo&list=PLlB6PYW8nJ2FsFvXVmjYHVI0GRrICE-Ze>.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3ZRURrTfuo&list=PLlB6PYW8nJ2F8Ewz9TMAJlZNWplfAPxts>.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p39F0yFYPCk>

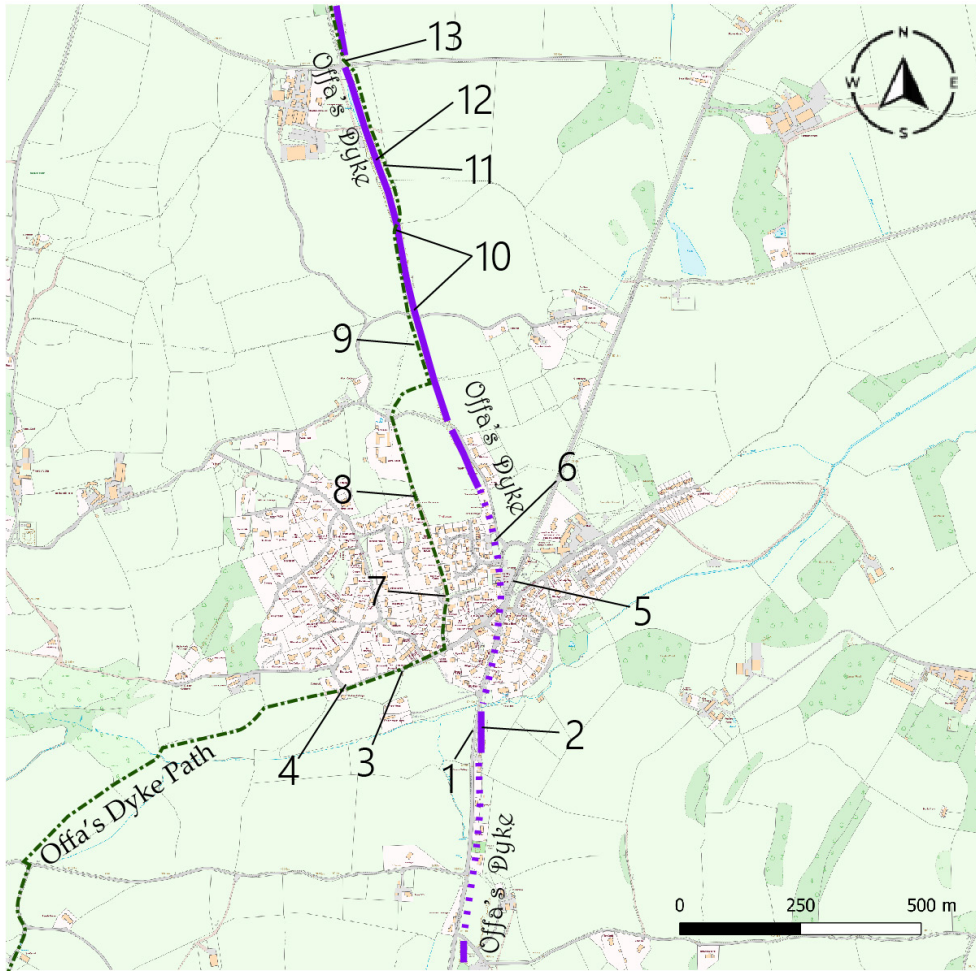


Figure 5: The Special Offa Tragical History Tour map (Designed by Liam Delaney and Howard Williams)

The Borders of Early Medieval England conference, 11–12 July 2020

While not organised by one of the Collaboratory co-convenors, this far-ranging conference organised by Dr Ben Guy brought together a host of historical views on early medieval frontiers in early medieval Britain. Exploring how borders operated and evolved prior to the Norman Conquest of AD 1066, the presentations addressed a host of themes and multiple Collaboratory members participated.⁴

Establishing boundaries at the EAA, 26 August 2020

The third Collaboratory-organised event in 2020 took place on 26 August 2020, the culmination of a year of planning resulted in a successful and far-reaching conference session

⁴ <https://bordersconference.wordpress.com/>



Figure 6: Screen shot from the Special Offa livestream on the Archaeology Soup YouTube channel

exploring boundaries, frontiers and borderlands across Europe (Figure 7). Co-organised by Liam Delaney, Astrid Tummuscheit, Howard Williams and Frauke Witte, session 245 at the 26th (virtual) annual meeting of the European Association for Archaeologists (#s245, #EAA2020virtual) explored *Establishing Boundaries: Linear Earthworks, Frontiers and Borderlands in Early Medieval Europe* (part of session theme 2: From Limes to regions: the archaeology of borders, connections and roads).⁵ This was a session sponsored by the Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC). The session demonstrated the ability of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory to address European, and indeed global, archaeological themes linked to frontiers and borderlands past and present, their history, archaeology and heritage. Attracting a significant audience of c. 35 archaeologists, the EAA plan to release a video recording of the presentations and discussions in due course.

Linear earthworks in Britain

A new project was launched by the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, and Durham University's Department of Archaeology titled 'Monumentality and Landscape: Linear Earthworks in Britain'. Funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the project aims to explore Iron Age and early medieval linear monuments in comparative terms by fresh analytical mapping, volumetric analysis using LiDAR data, plus new field investigations across the island of Britain.⁶

⁵ <https://submissions.e-a-a.org/ea2020/sessions/overview/preview.php?id=245>

⁶ <https://www.linear-earthworks.com/>



CALL FOR PAPERS

Session #245

Establishing Boundaries: Linear Earthworks, Frontiers and Borderlands in Early Medieval Europe

Organisers:

Liam Delaney (University of Chester, UK)
 Astrid Tummuscheit, (Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein, Germany)
 Howard Williams (University of Chester, UK)
 Frauke Witte (Museum Sønderjylland, Denmark)

In stark contrast to the sustained investigation of the Roman Empire's frontier zones, early medieval linear earthworks (including those called ramparts, dykes and walls) have been repeatedly marginalized in archaeological research. Even within investigations of early medieval territorial creation and organization, and further still for those earthworks of a monumental scale, such as Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke, Wansdyke and the Danevirke, their date, function and significance remain poorly understood. Yet these earthworks may have operated as the spines of early medieval frontiers and borderlands and their creation had ideological, political, social and economic dimensions. Their creation led, in some instances, to the establishment of the complex networks of surveillance and control, land divisions and territory formation which set the groundwork for the transformation of medieval communities and kingdoms. Even today, early medieval linear earthworks are deployed in political and cultural debates and discourses on migrations, ethnicity, frontiers and nationhood.

This MERC sponsored session aims to promote new research on early medieval frontier landscapes, including monumental linears, their landscape settings, afterlives and legacies, including their heritage management and interpretation. The session organisers invite contributions to address themes relating to linear earthworks and medieval frontiers and borderlands including:

- (i) their relation to post-Roman territorial regions;
- (ii) how they were components of frontier networks;
- (iii) the dating and biographies of these linear works;
- (iv) the role they played in the emergence and collapse of communities and kingdoms;
- (v) their role in interactions between different societies;
- (vi) what elements of broader ideological, political, cultural and economic geographies they represent;
- (vii) their contemporary role in modern cultural identity;
- (viii) the impact of heritage conservation, management and interpretation on these features;
- (viii) how they are viewed in contemporary media and popular culture.

Submit abstracts: <http://e-a-a.org/EAA2020>
 Deadline: **13th February 2020**

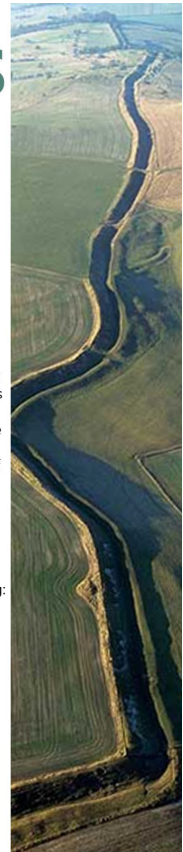


Figure 7: The EAA session poster by Liam Delaney

Offa's Dyke and coronavirus

The relationship between ancient linear monuments and contemporary politics has become more prominent during 2020. Keith Ray (2020) notes the ongoing geopolitical relevance of Offa's Dyke for the soft border between England and Wales where no single topographical feature can stand in lieu as a descriptor. He used the Tory Prime Minister David Cameron's statement from 2014 to show how Offa's Dyke continues to be appropriated as ammunition to support particular political positions (Henry 2014). Like Hadrian's Wall (see Bonacchi *et al.* 2018: 187), debates have intensified since the IndyRef 2014 and Brexit (Brophy 2018). Ray sensed that the political 'weaponisation' of Offa's Dyke has 'increased many times over' (albeit not based on quantitative data) (Ray 2020: 128).

Ray (2020: 126–128) identifies that Offa's Dyke serves a purpose in colloquial speech, not as a specific historical reference. Instead, it defines a physical marker, popularly imagined to be built by an 'English' king to define a 'border' against the Welsh for the entire length of the land-border between England and Wales. This fits into a wider pattern identified by Bonacchi *et al.* (2018) of the mobilisation of the past in polemical

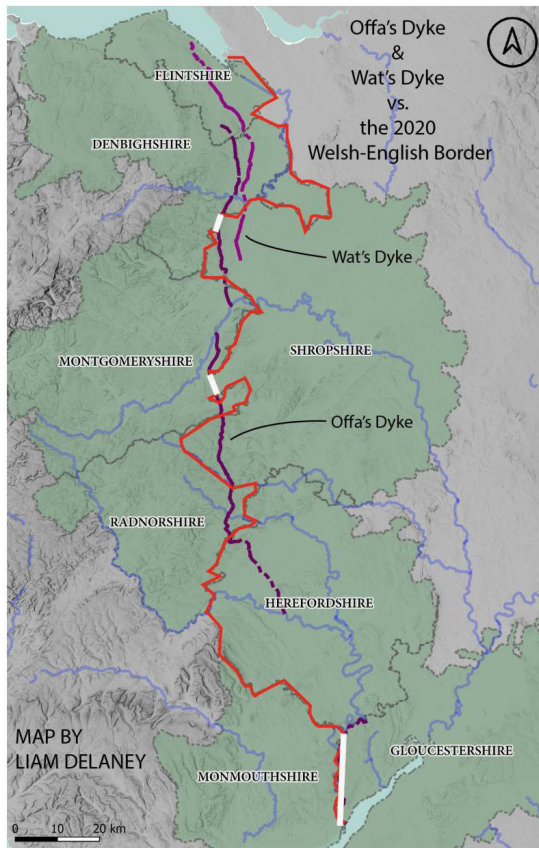


Figure 8: Map showing the relationship between the modern Anglo-Welsh border (red), Offa's Dyke (violet), Wat's Dyke (purple) and the small areas of coincidence between the border and Offa's Dyke (white) used in the Archaeodeath YouTube video and blog-post (Map by Liam Delaney)

discussions over Brexit since 2016. However, I would identify a threefold conflation of border, national trail and early medieval linear earthwork at play in current popular understandings when the phrase 'Offa's Dyke' is deployed.

The reality is that archaeologists still do not know whether Offa's Dyke was conceived of and built as a continuous line, whether it operated as a 'border' in a modern sense. Yet the surviving line of Offa's Dyke only follows the modern border for a small fraction of its surviving length (let alone the tinier fraction this would be had it actually run 'from sea to sea'). Ray (2020: 128) estimates 'less than one tenth' of Offa's Dyke coincides with the modern border. However, for those living far east and west of Offa's Dyke and not in the borderlands, such details must appear technicalities and only relevant to those who live in the borderlands itself. Therefore, 'Offa's Dyke' stands in proxy for a complex historical process of Anglo-Welsh

inequalities, rivalries and antagonisms as well as providing a geopolitical quasi-historical shorthand for the contemporary border. Yet for many locals and visitors alike, it also means the 'Offa's Dyke Path'; indeed as Ray (2020) has shown, there remain many confusions persist between the line of the Path which does run from 'sea to sea' and the Dyke which does not. Whether it was built as a colonial monument, over the centuries it certainly has become one, at least to some sections of the UK population.

Ray concludes by expressing concern over the exploitation of Offa's Dyke in relation to Brexit, but also a broader breakdown of consensus regarding 'Britishness' too (Gardner 2017). Conversely, Wat's Dyke is clearly too obscure and only makes sense for the northern part of the frontier, and so seems to have received no comparable attention (see Williams 2020a). Indeed, on 15 Nov 2019, Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price, in a positive response to the accusations that a 'hard border' with English would be the result if Welsh

independence transpired, stated: ‘Wales has never had a hard border, there was one attempt by a seventh-century Saxon King called Offa: built a Dyke and tried to keep the Welsh out. Didn’t work’ (see Williams 2020c). While getting the century of presumed construction wrong, Price was mobilising the popular nationalist perspective that Offa built the dyke against the Welsh to assure listeners that a ‘hard border’ is neither desirable nor feasible as a future dimension of Welsh independence. Yet unlike subsequent commentators, he did not conflate Offa with the ‘English’ or ‘England’ today (Williams 2020c).

Despite this long tradition of conflating Offa’s Dyke with the Anglo-Welsh border, few could have anticipated how the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns would not only see a dramatic impact on the heritage and tourism sectors, including the Offa’s Dyke Association and the Offa’s Dyke Path, but would also witness Offa’s Dyke becoming itself mobilised in political and popular discourse. Often through attempts at humour, but also in aggressive and chauvinistic ways, in discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown the Dyke has been repeatedly evoked. Specifically, hard-border perception and militaristic associations are made explicit in these evocations, thus equating and conflating past and present divisions between the ‘Welsh’ and the ‘English’ via references to the ancient linear earthwork.

The context for this was the ongoing, fluctuating and increasingly conflicting positions of political administrations of a Conservative-run Westminster administration and the Welsh Labour-domination of the Senedd Cymru in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on, from March 2020, tourists and day-visitors poured into rural districts of Wales despite lockdown restrictions, causing an outcry and demands for ‘Offa’s Dyke’ to be fortified/rebuilt. As the lockdown persisted into May 2020, Liam Delaney identified the problem and a blog-post and YouTube video was composed in response (Figure 8) (Williams 2020c; see also Jonson 2020; Morgan 2020; Smith *et al.* 2020). While recognising that it was often said in jest, and even by academics alongside politicians, celebrities and the wider public, I pointed out that Offa’s Dyke never was a border between ‘England’ and ‘Wales’ (neither having existed in the eighth century, and conflating intermittently surviving monument with both the Offa’s Dyke Path and the Anglo-Welsh border is geographically illiterate and irresponsible in contemporary political discourse (Williams 2020c).

Tensions rose sharply again, however, when local areas of Wales were on lockdown again in September and early October 2020, especially in the context that English visitors were able to visit from areas with high infection rates whilst those in local lockdown areas in Wales could not do the same. Further still, when Wales entered its two-week firebreak national lockdown on 24 October and England refused to follow similar measures, further jokes and bile were posted online in which Offa’s Dyke was again deployed to refer to the border being ‘rebuilt’ or ‘fortified’, as well as castigating the First Minister, Mark Drakeford for imposing allegedly unfair restrictions and ‘declaring war’ on the economy (e.g. Lynn 2020). The *Mail Online*, for example, featured photographs of the Offa’s Dyke Path and signs to the Offa’s Dyke Centre in discussing how the border town of Knighton was divided by the new restrictions (Weston and Martin 2020) (Figure 8). This situation



Figure 9: COVID frontiers: (above-left) the pandemic lockdown signs in Knighton outside the Offa's Dyke Centre and (above-right) the door of the Centre (Photographs by David McGlade, 2020)

was then flipped, with Wales coming out of its two-week lockdown and England going back in to a four-week national lockdown through November. In this context, some commented that Offa's Dyke need to be 'reversed' as the Welsh might attempt to leave.

The full and significant impact on tourism and the economy of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands has yet to be fully evaluated, with many sections of the Offa's Dyke Path, and the Offa's Dyke Centre, closed to visitors (Figure 9). Equally, the public use of Offa's Dyke to articulate frustrations and dissent regarding the lockdown regulations is a study deserving of systematic analysis of social media posts. How Offa's Dyke and Hadrian's Wall are being perceived and deployed in popular and political discourse is a focus of ongoing attention through big data analysis (see Bonacchi *et al.* 2018; Bonacchi and Krzyzanska 2019). Still, the impression is clear from a brief survey of Twitter posts mentioning 'Offa's Dyke' that myths of both conquest by, and resistance to, the Anglo-Saxons of the past and the English of today, are being mobilised through the Dyke (cf. Bonacchi *et al.* 2018). Who knows what coming weeks and months will bring in UK politics but these instances show that Ray is only partly correct in saying that Offa's Dyke is a popular shorthand for the Anglo-Welsh soft border. In addition, its past military and ethno-linguistic dimensions are explicitly used within English and Welsh nationalistic discourse and the latent potential of it being reinstated as a hard border, and rebuilt as a military frontier, either by its original 'English' creators, or 'reversed' by the 'Welsh'. For example, Welsh journalist reacting to a column by right-wing writer Toby Young tweeted on 22 October 2020: 'Fortify Offa's

Dyke NOW'.⁷ Indeed, season 4 of *The Last Kingdom*, first aired in early 2020, had already presented a fictional early tenth-century context in which the famous Hywel Dda proposes to do just what present-day commentators are suggesting and rebuild and reverse Offa's Dyke (Williams 2020d). This popular cultural reference and wider political mobilisations of the monument in the context of COVID-19 reveal the place of Offa's Dyke in a wider public consciousness as the border and a zone of confusion and dispute between both England and Wales, ostensibly between Cardiff and Westminster. The Dyke thus mediates a sense of threat felt between both English and Welsh people, albeit often framed in humour, in which the concept of a hard or even fortified frontier drawing upon a 1100-year-old precedent is a seductive fantasy. While Ray is surely correct that the local scale of community engagement provides the rejoinder to nationalistic and chauvinistic discourses (Ray 2020: 145), academics must work to responsibly counter the repeated appropriations of the past to serve contemporary political ends (e.g. Brophy 2018; Williams *et al.* 2020).

If Offa's Dyke has emerged as an ongoing weaponised tool for popular dissonance, in the heartland of Mercia, the Anglo-Saxon period and its material culture has taken on a positive dimension during the pandemic lockdown. Evoked to encourage support for pandemic social distancing measures, Tamworth Borough Council devised two 'shield yourself' posters. One depicted shields emblazoned with the yellow cross on blue background of Tamworth's coat of arms, held up by stick figures to articulate the 2m rule. Meanwhile, a replica Sutton Hoo mask is shown against a (now) commonplace fabric one with the humorous motto: 'You don't have to be *exactly* like Saxons.... This will be fine' (Figure 10). This light-hearted message reminds us that evocations of a martial early medieval past need not always be negative, and early medieval linear earthworks too might be deployed as positive forces in today's society.



Figure 10: COVID-19 posters encouraging social distancing by Tamworth Borough Council (reproduced with permission)

⁷ https://twitter.com/simon_price01/status/1319237695219093504



Figure 11: The statue of Offa at Powis Castle: an Anglo-Saxon ruler in a colonial context (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2019)

Dykes and the colonial countryside

Britain's colonial landscape has been the focus of intense and passionate debate during 2020 in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests. From the toppling of Colston's statue in Bristol (e.g. Figs 2020; Hicks 2020; Olusoga 2020; Siddique and Skopeliti 2020), to the protests and counter-protests in London, the UK debates rapidly spread far beyond public statuary and monuments to consider how the colonial legacy is recognised in the British landscape and what steps should be taken to highlight and explore often overtly obscured and hidden traces of slavery and colonial connections in the countryside.⁸

The National Trust are one of the organisations that have gone beyond passive recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement and

have enacted initiatives to reflect and develop engagement with the colonial legacies of a selection of the properties in their care, having commissioned an interim report focused on the slaving links in the histories of many of their country houses (Huxtable *et al.* 2020). Despite largely spurious outrage by some politicians and sections of the British media (Bush 2020), this is a welcome and far-reaching report that speaks a pervasive theme for the study and heritage conservation, management and interpretation of the historic landscape. The publication focuses on the historical personages who once built and occupied country houses and their economic interests and politics, as well as the presence and representation of Black people. These are all necessary and essential foci for tackling the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism more broadly. Yet, to date, the estates of the National Trust properties, and the town and country landscapes in which they are situated, have yet to be tackled in this exploration of colonial connections and legacies. Moreover, the broader backcloth of ancient and medieval colonialisms in relation to country houses has yet to be addressed in any systematic fashion (Williams 2020f, 2020g; see also Gosden 2004).

⁸ E.g. see the Legacies of British Slave Ownership project: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>



Figure 12: Looking north along a much-denuded line of Offa's Dyke beside the National Trust car park at Chirk Castle. The Dyke is unmarked and without heritage interpretation, yet every car or coach-driven visitor to Chirk Castle crosses the monument to reach the car park, and then most pedestrian visitors will walk over the Dyke past the adventure playground (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2016)

In the context of this discussion of linear monuments, it is therefore important to recognise that colonialism in the modern era can be set against deep-time ancient and medieval processes of colonialism in the British landscape. One manifestation of these are linear frontier works built by the Roman Empire, Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. Yet, the great linear earthworks constructed by the Mercian kingdom in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke, can also be conceptualised as colonial monuments, implementing and articulating the control of the landscape through hegemonic power (Ray and Bapty 2016) and thus requiring post-colonial interpretations in the contemporary world. Dykes were not only frontier and military constructions, but also instruments of colonial and colonising strategies inherent in their design, affordances and legacies down to the present day (Ray 2020). Arguably, engaging in fresh ways with early medieval dykes, therefore, is a further fruitful basis for decolonising the countryside through their reinterpretation alongside efforts to reevaluate the colonial impact of the modern era.

This is important since these ancient monuments not only continue to frame ethnonationalist discourses in recent centuries (Bonacchi *et al.* 2018), but also there are



Figure 13: Erddig Hall National Trust property looking south-south-east towards the house from the line of Wat's Dyke which formerly ran along the ridge-top but is now lost due to landscaping (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2016)

multiple heritage sites and landscapes where ancient, medieval and modern colonialisms intersect and, arguably, interact, whether by happenstance or active consideration, shedding light on histories of slavery and colonial exploitation. For the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, for example, it is possible to consider the colonial legacy of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and later medieval settlements and peoples alongside the modern history of the city of Chester and its environs. Likewise, the immediate proximities between Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke and multiple country estates with great houses with imperial and colonial connections include the National Trust properties of Powis Castle and Chirk Castle to Erddig Hall (Huxtable *et al.* 2020: 107, 109). At each, the connections between the modern colonial era and the early medieval linear earthworks in their proximity are striking yet completely overlooked in present-day heritage interpretation.

Powis Castle (Powys) contains the collections of Robert Clive (of India) and his son became 1st Earl of Powis (Huxtable *et al.* 2020: 46). A medieval borderlands castle in origin, the residences has spectacular views overlooking the Severn valley with Offa's Dyke crossing the valley slopes to the east. King Offa is one of two Anglo-Saxon monarchs (the other being King Edgar) whose statues frame the main northern entrance; the early medieval past is thus materially and spatially connected to the residence's colonial legacy (Williams 2019) (Figure 11).



Figure 14: A monument of resistance to Mercian colonisation? The early ninth-century cross now known as the Pillar of Eliseg, survives in fragments and re-positioned on top of the Early Bronze Age burial mound close to Valle Crucis Abbey, Denbighshire (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

Originally a strategically sited thirteenth-century castle, the National Trust property of Chirk (Wrexham) was home to an investor in privateers and the sugar trade, Sir Thomas Myddleton (Huxtable *et al.* 2020: 49). Moreover, the castle is located adjacent to the surviving line of Offa's Dyke. The monument is large but denuded on the Chirk estate but dramatic in scale as it descends south of the castle into the Glyn Ceiriog. However, there are no heritage interpretation panels or details in the visitor guide book about the linear earthwork. This is despite the fact that almost every visitor walks and/or drives over the monument at least twice during their visit; the Dyke is disconnected from the successive stories of colonialism to be found in the castle and its landscape (Williams 2016a) (Figure 12).

There is also an absence of interpretation for Wat's Dyke at Erddig Hall where the Mercian frontier work ran through the estate and was later incorporated into an Anglo-Norman motte-and-bailey castle (see also Belford 2019). Erddig Hall had been built by Joshua Edisbury, one of whose main benefactors was Elihu Yale. Yale made his fortune with the East Indian Company (Huxtable *et al.* 2020: 107; Williams 2020g). Yet, neither existing heritage interpretation nor the recent report recognise the slaving links of Yale



Figure 15: Wat's Dyke at Soughton Farm, looking south-east (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

to the wider landscape including his former residence at Plas Grono or his tomb in nearby Wrexham. Equally, there is no recognised connection between these country house and the earlier phases of colonialism revealed by the late eighth-/early ninth-century dyke and the late eleventh-century castle (Figure 13).

These case studies reveal intersections between the colonial countryside's ancient, medieval and modern dimensions which need to be tackled alongside the specific historical personages with slaving links. Others surely exist linking the Anglo-Welsh borderlands and early medieval linear earthworks to the legacy of colonialism and slavery (e.g. Williams 2020e). Such instances illustrate the work still to be done, not only by the National Trust but also other heritage organisations and practitioners aspiring to rethink how best to conserve, manage and interpret the British landscape through a decolonising lens.

I contend that recognising and explaining walls and borders past and present, not only the traces of recent divisions (e.g. McWilliams 2001) but also those of the distant past, must be a key ingredient in such endeavours to explore movement and memory, domination and resistance, imperialism and colonialism, in the landscape. This involves considering broader alterities of power and hegemony but also subaltern stories in the landscape (e.g. Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017; cf. Ray and Bapty 2016), so that monuments such as

the Pillar of Eliseg, inscribed to commemorate the dynasty of Powys in close proximity to Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, can be conceptualised as material components of the complex biographies of conflict and collaboration in the borderlands from the Early Middle Ages to the present day in relation to both Mercian linear monuments (Figure 14). In doing so, specific sections of preserved linear monument, such as Wat's Dyke at Soughton Farm, Northop (Figure 15), cannot be neglected without a narrative for local communities and visitors. We must strive to contextualise these monuments in relation to the wider inhabited historic environment in which identities and senses of place are configured and negotiated (see Williams this volume).

Reviewing volume 2

This context amplifies the necessity of an open-access, digital and peer-reviewed venue for the publication of academic work on frontiers and borderlands in the human past and in today's world. For the *Offa's Dyke Journal*, our remit set for volume 1 was to re-publish classic reports that shed light on linear monuments and their relationships with frontiers and borderlands that, while published elsewhere, have remained difficult to access and thus were sometimes overlooked or ignored (A. Williams 2019; Worthington Hill 2019). Moreover, volume 1 set the precedent for the dissemination of the latest fieldwork, analyses and syntheses from across differing disciplines exploring linear earthwork's functions and significance in the human past (Belford 2019; Seaman 2019; Tummuscheit and Witte 2019), and in today's world (Swogger 2019) extending far beyond Offa's Dyke. Indeed, as our Introductory essay made crystal clear and evidenced by only two of the six articles tackling Offa's Dyke directly (Williams and Delaney 2019), the title *Offa's Dyke Journal* was explicitly used to create a focus and a tone for the journal's content, not to set this one linear monument as the journal's primary subject.

This second volume repeats and extends this broader remit in the study of linear monuments and their landscape contexts past and present. The volume opens with Mark Bell's original article, building off his 2012 book-length survey (Bell 2012). Focusing on two sets of linear earthworks in southern Britain, Bell shows how they have been tenacious chimera and despite being long debunked and re-dated to later prehistory, they continue to conjoin and perpetuate popular accounts of the Early Middle Ages. Yet despite Bell's lead, and other discussions of antiquarian and early archaeological accounts of linear monuments (e.g. Ray and Bapty 2016; Ray 2020; Williams 2019), there remains a wider dearth of in-depth critical historiographies of linear monuments. The Offa's Dyke Collaboratory has identified this as a required principal focus of ongoing research by historians of antiquarianism and archaeology.

Linked to challenges of dating and interpreting linear monuments, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews writes a definitive critique of key pseudoarchaeological narratives about Britain's linear earthworks. For while there is a demonstrable global bias away in the application of pseudoarchaeological theories to non-European sites and monuments,

Wansdyke and Offa's Dyke in particular have attracted occasional fantastical narratives attributing them as 'prehistoric canals', the deeds of Roman emperors or sub-Roman 'Arthurian' military stop-lines. Crucially, Fitzpatrick-Matthews also identifies the dangers of elevating provisional dating and tentative interpretations within mainstream academic discourse to the status of unequivocal facts. In combination, Bell and Fitzpatrick-Matthews reveal how the difficulties within defining the dates, extents and contexts of linear earthworks make it difficult to debunk old-fashioned conceptions surrounding them and renders them ripe for use and misuse for dubious and spurious pseudoarchaeological narratives. This is the very reason that the aforementioned select linear monuments equated with modern borders – Hadrian's Wall and Offa's Dyke – are particularly powerful and dangerous within contemporary political discourses.

This leads us to the heritage interpretation of linear earthworks in the contemporary landscape. Doyle White focuses on Kent's Faesten Dic, an undated linear earthwork which has been afforded interpretation panels and sculpture which promotes an old-fashioned interpretation as a military defence demarcating Saxon Kent from Roman London. Doyle White reviews the (ambiguous) evidence for its date and function and proceeds to explore the difficulties and political context of the recent narrative for the monument.

Exploring the material cultures and landscapes of contemporary landscapes in relation to ancient linear earthworks is a theme taken up by Williams, exploring naming practices in the Welsh Marches associated with Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke. Williams argues for both the unrecognised significance of naming practices for materialising monuments hiding in plain sight and constituting an ingrained element of borderland identities constituted by them, but also the untapped potential of these place-names for mobilising localities to engage with these monuments' histories and significances in today's world (see also Williams 2020a).

The collection concludes with two 'classic revisited' articles. First there is David Hill's 1991 survey of the Offa's Dyke Project's fieldwork on both Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke in Flintshire, and then a re-publication of Tim Malim's 2007 consideration of Grim's Ditch and Wansdyke. Individually, in combination, and in juxtaposition with the original articles, these pieces have enduring value for students and scholars seeking to interpret Britain's later prehistoric and early historic linear earthworks.

Conclusion

Set against a broader backcloth of growing ethno-nationalism and xenophobia in the UK, manifest in the debates surrounding both IndyRef 2014 and the Brexit process, and the divisive 2016–2020 Trump administration in the USA, I am writing this article on Saturday 7 November 2020 when Biden/Harris have been projected by global and US media as winners of the US Presidential election. On the aftermath of both the Black Lives Matter movement and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this is a momentous day.

Likewise, one of the very foundations of Trump's original 2016 presidential campaign and ongoing rhetoric, the US-México 'Trump's Wall', can now be firmly regarded as fictitious, with only a short stretch of new wall built where none had existed before, even if existing border walls have been replaced over hundreds of miles. In short, the border has been fortified but a distinctive 'Trump's Wall' is little more than rhetoric (Rodgers and Bailey 2020).

Yet barriers, ancient and modern, do not evaporate with violent regime changes or democratic elections. For the UK, the Brexit process has encouraged a new tide of antagonisms within and beyond the UK, building off (among other things) the 2014 IndyRef process and the 2015 Refugee Crisis and its aftermath. In this political environment, the material remains of Britain's past have been politicised in all manner of fashions (see Brophy 2020), set against a broader strategies of militarised and hard borders, as well as localised community wall-building, during the late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century (McAtackney and McGuire 2020).

Having provided something of the unique context the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory finds itself in 2020, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which have enhanced and sharpened the popular debate and political mobilisation of already contested linear earthworks and their perceived relationship with contemporary borders, I argue that the academic study of linear monuments and their frontier and borderland contexts has never been more crucial. Wall-building and wall-uses dominate our popular consciousness like never before within these global circumstances and this has directly impacted upon both Hadrian's Wall for ongoing Scottish-English relations, and for Welsh-English relations attention has intensified around Offa's Dyke. Indeed, his mobilisation of ancient monuments is particularly uniquely powerful and distinctive: this pair of ancient monuments materialise modern tensions and discourses in a fashion unparalleled elsewhere in the Britain, Ireland and across Europe.

Following Spring's (2015: 322–327) projection, the neglect of walls and linear monuments for critical and scholarly attention is long overdue systematic redressing across disciplines. Reflecting on the enduring mythology of the Maginot Line as a failed line of defence and a broader mentality of fixed barriers as negative and futile, exacerbated by the legacy of the 'too successful' semi-permanent trenches of the First World War, Spring recognises scholars' 'unconscious horror of linear obstacles' (Spring 2015: 324). This builds upon a cluster of theoretical, methodological and practical factors behind this which have worked against the serious study of linear monuments past and present (see also McGuire 2020).

Spring's (2015) advocacy of a shared primacy of the military function of pre-modern linear barriers (see also Grigg 2018) and his naturalisation of them as a common human response to a similar set of problems throughout human history should be moderated. Still, the need to rectify the neglect and biases he rightly specifies is fair and clear. Specifically, together with the contemporary archaeological work of McAtackney and McGuire's

(2020) collection and the public archaeology perspectives of Gleave *et al.* (2020), the articles published here together demonstrate the timely and necessary role of the *Offa's Dyke Journal* in collating and disseminating academic research across disciplinary divides and to wider publics (e.g. Clarke *et al.* 2020; Swogger and Williams 2020).

To reflect the importance of ancient borders as not a means of valorising military works, but celebrating the redundancy of borders and barriers past, I end with Frank Noble's words, written in his guide to the Offa's Dyke Path he was instrumental in creating. In reflecting on the official opening of the Path on 10 July 1971, Noble reminds us of the positive power of ancient, now defunct, frontiers and borderlands to reflect on new ways to construct shared pasts and new connections, rather than misguided attempts of creating new fashions to divide us.

At a time when Britain's entry into the Common Market was being negotiated, the largest frontier earthwork dating back to the period when the present nations of Europe had their origins, was being put to peaceful use. As a precedent for the adaption of redundant European frontiers – preserving national identities without provoking conflicts – it may have come at a remarkably apposite moment. Twelve hundred years lie behind the Dyke. There is no excuse for looking short-sightedly along this Path (Noble 1981: 13).

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Two Chimeras in the Landscape

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This article discusses the history of investigations into British linear earthworks in the twentieth century. The influence of pre-existing beliefs about the environment of Britain, especially the existence of impassable forest cover, deeply influenced the interpretation of linear monuments and had a lasting effect on the study of these monuments. A brief history of the personalities involved is followed by two case studies of monuments that were believed to be post-Roman in date but are now seen as Iron Age monuments. The implications of the change in the relationship to of the dykes to the landscape is discussed along with potential future research, better informed by an awareness of this confusing tradition of field archaeology.

Keywords: dykes, history of archaeology, landscape, linear earthworks.

According to Homer the Chimaera was of divine origin. In front it was a lion, behind it was a serpent, and in the middle a goat, and was brought up by King Amisodarus as a plague for men. (Peck 1898: 327)

Introduction

A chimera is a creature made-up of parts of other animals and is an appropriate symbol for some of Britain's linear earthworks that first appear to be whole and complete but on closer examination are made up of elements of very different dates and functions. In this article, I aim to discuss the specific cases of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch and the Silchester Dykes as examples of chimeras that were created in the landscape by earlier generations of archaeologists and which remain misleading phenomena that still plague archaeologists in terms of their date, function and significance.

An outline of the history of the investigations into the dykes in the first half of the twentieth century is important to see how archaeologists interpreted these monuments and how these investigations shaped the views of researchers throughout the rest of the twentieth century and popular (mis)understandings to this day. It may be a platitude that archaeological interpretation is always conducted through a screen of pre-existing ideology and prejudice but looking at some of the archaeological publications of a century ago they show to the twenty-first century reader an almost unrecognisable view of ancient Britain. Therefore, investigating the history of the dykes should aim to identify and remove some of the accreted 'factoids' about them, interpretations that hardened into accepted facts that are difficult to dislodge, especially if they have the prestige of famous archaeologists' names behind them. For instance, the early nineteenth-century antiquarian Joseph Train speculated that a 'Pictish wall' had existed all the way around Galloway. This idea was partly dismantled by A. Graham (Graham 1949; Graham and Feachem 1956) after field survey on alleged sections of the dyke, though he was unwilling to dismiss the idea of the existence of the dyke entirely. Subsequently, fieldwork on the Deil's Dyke, a key section

of the whole system, in the 1980s (Barber 1982) showed that the dyke was a medieval boundary partly overlying an Iron Age one. However, this information was published in the niche publication, the *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* which did not enjoy as wide an audience as the earlier descriptions of the 'Pictish Wall' had found. Consequently, the idea is still sometimes revived, even in this century (Grigg 2006).

British archaeologists inherit a long tradition of fanciful speculations that have long endured, but also interpretations of linear earthworks as evidence of racial divisions and conflict in Britain deriving from nineteenth-century antiquaries and historians. For example, in 1913, Major P.T. Godsall could confidently explain that Wansdyke could only be built by the Saxons against the Celts because only men of different races build walls against each other.¹ Any investigation into the history of the dykes should not be treated just as an amusing and condescending look at some of the outdated and sometimes bizarre ideas of a previous generation of archaeologists but instead it should aim to understand how the rise and fall of a particular vision of dykes in the British landscape still influences academic and popular understandings of these monuments today. Again, these have persisted into even twenty-first century heritage interpretation and popular culture (Doyle White 2020).

Moreover, there are pervasive and persistent 'alternative' or 'fringe' views of Britain's linear earthworks, some with roots in these discarded and discredited nineteenth or early twentieth century interpretations. One recent extreme example is R.J. Langdon's theory of Offa's Dyke and Wansdyke being giant prehistoric canals (Langdon 2014). Others have included J.L. Fern's idea that Offa's Dyke was long distance routeway for prehistoric flint traders (Ferns 1985) or that Offa's Dyke can be re-dated and considered to be a Roman monument built in the reign of Septimius Severus (Blake and Lloyd 2003). For a more detailed discussion see the article by Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2020).

The consensus on how changes occurred from the Roman period to the early medieval period has also changed radically since the first half of the twentieth century, when mass invasion was the explanation for every cultural change. Works such as Wells' *Barbarians to Angels; the Dark Ages Reconsidered* (Wells 2008) or Wickham's *The Inheritance of Rome* (Wickham 2009) see the period as a vibrant period of change, not as a period of collapse. Despite this or maybe because of this change of view, how the linear earthworks fit into the early medieval period is now more difficult. Indeed, many recent works on the post-Roman and early medieval periods barely mention the dykes. For example, Halsall's (2013) *The Worlds of Arthur* omits them from the discussion, while Fleming's *Britain After Rome* (Fleming 2011) only briefly mentions Offa's Dike (sic) with

¹ Major Philip Thomas Godsall (1850–1925) was a military man like General Pitt-Rivers. He was interested in history and wrote several books on the Anglo-Saxon invasions, describing in detail the routes and battles of Hengist and Aella and taking the text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as entirely accurate and reliable. His work was brutally dismissed as 'frankly fiction' by Sir Charles Oman (Oman 1929).

no discussion of the monument or of other linear earthworks. Meanwhile, Dark (2000) in *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* tries to see them as an inheritance of Britishness disconnected from Anglo-Saxon (Germanic-speaking peoples') traditions and practice:

The dykes represent another aspect of the fusion of British and Germanic culture – in 'free Germania' people did not construct such dykes but they did in fifth- and sixth-century western Britain. (Dark 2000: 93; see also Laycock 2008: 228).

This is, of course, a debateable point when Denmark has one of the largest linear earthworks in Europe and many other Roman Iron Age dykes (Andresen 2008; Dobat 2008; Tummuscheit and Witte 2019). To contextualise this relative neglect and the persistence of out-dated notions, we must explore the character and context of early twentieth-century researchers.

Early twentieth-century researchers

In the early part of the twentieth century while the cast of characters involved in studying the dykes was quite small, even considering the small size of the archaeological profession in Britain at the time, they were import members of the fledgling archaeological profession. The two men who dominated the study of linear earthworks in this period were Sir Cyril Fox and O.G.S. Crawford, both of whom made major contributions to the study of the dykes from the 1920s to the 1950s. Both men came from similar academic backgrounds; they had both studied geography, Fox at Cambridge, and Crawford at Oxford just before the First World War. At the time geography was a relatively new and unfashionable degree level subject. Fox's undergraduate dissertation *The Archaeology of the Cambridgeshire Region* was published in 1923 (Fox 1949) while Crawford's *The Andover District* (Crawford 1922) was also originally his undergraduate thesis submitted for his diploma in Geography in 1910. Both men applied the techniques of geography, especially the use of distribution maps, to archaeology.

Sir Cyril Fox worked on the dykes throughout his archaeological career. He began by excavating the Fleam Dyke, one of the Cambridgeshire Dykes, in the 1920s (Fox 1923; Fox and Palmer 1922). When he moved to the National Museum of Wales in 1926, he did survey and field work on Offa's Dyke every summer up to 1930 (Fox 1955). In the 1950s, he worked with his wife Aileen Fox on survey and excavation of both the east and west Wansdyke (Fox and Fox 1958). Crawford's interest in linear earthworks stretched back to the beginning of his archaeological career before the First World War. In the 1920s and 1930s, as part of the Ordnance Survey, he was responsible for mapping linear earthworks for the revisions of OS maps (Hauser 2008). Crawford also compiled the map of the Dark Ages published by the Ordnance Survey in the 1930s (Ordnance Survey 1938; Ordnance Survey 1939).

Two lesser known archaeologists who were important to the study of linear earthworks in the first half of the twentieth century were Bryan St John O'Neil and Harold Peake. Harold Peake was a friend and patron to O.G.S. Crawford. He was son of a vicar and independently wealthy. In the words of his obituary 'He belonged to the British tradition of scholarship without professional commitments, and he gave his life to intellectual and public work' (Fleure 1947: 48). He was interested in anthropology and folk life as well as archaeology, was a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and honorary curator of Newbury Museum among other interests. In contrast, Bryan St John O'Neil was one of a small number of professional archaeologists, an inspector of ancient monuments at the Ministry of Works. When the entire Ministry of Works was evacuated to Rhyl at the beginning of the Second World War, O'Neil was the only inspector left in London. His responsibilities included supervising excavations in advance of building works for military sites and recording bomb damaged historic buildings. His memorial volume (Jope 1961) suggests that this heavy workload probably contributed to his early death in 1954.

The environmental background

Rather than an antidote to fanciful and outmoded conceptions, the empirical and field-based nature of British archaeology in the first half of the twentieth century proved part of the problem. As it struggled to professionalise itself, it worked hard to distance itself from outdated and fantastical 'fringe' beliefs, such as those focused on druids, hyper-diffusionism and ley hunting. Yet archaeology was both an under-theorised subject and seen by many as a practical, empirical discipline:

This 'scholarship', however, rested upon a series of very simplistic narratives, a framework of stadial and environmental determinism whose parameters had been decided within other disciplines' (Stout 2008: 236)

This environmental determinism had a detrimental effect on the study of Britain's linear earthworks and allowed older notions to flourish. The history of early medieval earthwork studies is therefore not a traditional narrative about a sudden conceptual revolution where the dykes were repeatedly reinterpreted in the light of new theories and new data. While supposed individual earthworks were excavated and re-dated there was no general change in their understanding as a group. Instead, as the understanding of the environment and archaeology of Britain in both the prehistoric and the early medieval periods advanced rapidly from the 1960s on, dykes were mainly ignored as they did not fit into the new models that became available, especially for the Early Middle Ages. This is possibly one of the reasons why studies of these linear earthworks have been marginalised and today stand slightly outside the mainstream of early medieval archaeology, although, as we shall see, they have been embraced within narratives about later prehistory.

It is worth recapping the environmental assumptions that underlay the interpretation of the dykes done in the 1920s and 1930s, most of which went back to the nineteenth century. In an anonymous review of Pitt-Rivers' *Excavations in Bokerly Dyke and Wansdyke 1888–1892* by 'B' in the *Archaeological Journal* of 1892, the reviewer says:

When the people advanced to a higher state of civilisation, and several tribes combined for the defence of a district, it was not by detached forts, but by great dykes or continuous lines of ditch and bank, the latter probably surmounted by a stockade, running for miles along the open country, from an inaccessible position on one flank to some other natural defence on the other. That some of these dykes now appear to us to terminate *en l'air* is due to the disappearance of forests, the draining of marshes, or even to the total surface obliteration of lengths of dyke under long cultivation. (B. 1893: 316–317)

Here we can see a familiar argument that has been used again and again and in much the same way. If dykes have inconvenient gaps or they suddenly end in the middle of a field they must have once been continuous structures. Gaps or sudden endings can always be explained away by a change in the environmental such as the loss of forest cover or the draining of swamp land since the dyke was built.

This idea of a prehistoric Britain being covered with pristine and untouched woodland, full of wild and dangerous animals is still a powerful idea that resonates today. Martin Tingle (Tingle 2006) has shown that this idea of prehistoric jungle covered Britain dates back at least to the time of Sir Richard Colt Hoare and the very beginnings of field archaeology in the early nineteenth century. This idea persisted and was refined through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

Fox's *The Personality of Britain* first published in 1932 (Fox 1943) is an important source for this environmental background because it makes these assumptions about the environment and landscape of Britain very explicit and had a continuing influence. It first made the distinction between a British highland zone and a lowland zone from prehistoric times. Crucially, while the highland zone was isolated from the influences of mainland Europe the lowland zone was open to influences from Europe but also vulnerable to migration and invasion. Most of the land area of the lowland zone was uninhabited, here the heavy clay soils being covered by what Fox called 'damp oakwood' that was not suitable for cultivation by the simple prehistoric plough and was also crucially totally impassable to human traffic. Human habitation in lowland zone was restricted to the chalk downs which were isolated from each other by the 'damp oakwood'.

The Personality of Britain fossilised this view of the impassable jungle landscape of most of the lowland zone. The concept of the prehistoric landscape being centred on the chalk

downs of Wessex, with ridgeways radiating out like spokes from a wheel was not Fox's idea. He was just making explicit the received wisdom about the past landscape that dated back to the nineteenth century. Comparing Fox writing in *The Personality of Britain* in 1932 to Hilaire Belloc in *The Old Road* published in 1911 shows the similarities:

The key to understanding of this pattern lies at its centre, the chalk plateau formed by Salisbury Plain and the White Horse Hills; thence extend ranges of low hills in all directions. To the S. W, the Western Downs extend to the sea between Weymouth and Lyme Regis; to the east are the Hampshire Downs, from which extend like two fingers the North and South Downs ... (Fox 1943: 29)

If one looks at a map of England in relief one sees that five great ridges of high land come, the first from just east of north, the second from the northeast, the third and fourth from the east, and the fifth from the south and west, to converge on Wilts and the Hampshire border.

Roughly speaking, their area of convergence is Salisbury Plain, and it has been suggested that Avebury and Stonehenge drew the importance of their sites from this convergence; for these continuous high lands would present the first natural highways by which a primitive people could gather from all parts of the island. (Belloc 1911: 22)

There were already challenges to this view of impassable damp oakwood covering lowland England before this. As early as 1902 W.H. Stevenson critically examined the work of Dr Edwin Guest (1800–1880). He complained that Guest believed that:

Great stretches of country are filled up with woodlands, and these are assumed to have been so impassable that the English invaders were compelled to leave them in the hands of the Britons. But in fact we have no trustworthy evidence as to the extent of land under trees in the fifth and sixth centuries. (Stevenson 1902: 626)

Objections to this model continued and in 1933 S.W. Wooldridge and D.L. Linton published a paper in *Antiquity* where they pointed out the importance of the loess soils in the lowland zone which were as easy to cultivate as the chalk and that Fox's binary division of soils into permeable and impermeable was far too simplistic a view (Wooldridge and Linton 1933). They also noted the high density of archaeological finds in places not on chalk soils, such as around Godalming in Surrey, in Norfolk in the area around Norwich and in the valleys of major rivers such as the Thames and the Medway. By the late 1940s, this model of only chalk being fit for settlement was becoming less and less plausible as more and more sites and artefacts were being found

away from the chalk. There was a brief attempt to ascribe all these non-chalk sites to a ‘Belgic’ invasion where incoming Iron Age people used a wheeled plough that could cultivate the heavier soils, that supposedly occurred around 50 BC. In the 1948 reissue of *The Archaeology of the Cambridgeshire* region, Fox notes in appendix four the criticisms of his soil model but then passes over the problem without any counter argument.

This view of a mostly impassable forest landscape was tenaciously held for a long time. In 1955, W.G. Hoskins wrote what must be one of the most influential books ever written on the English landscape. On the first page of *The Making of the English Landscape*, he could write with confidence:

The English landscape as we know it today is almost entirely a product of the last fifteen hundred years, beginning with the earliest Anglo-Saxon villages in the middle decades of the fifth century. The direct prehistoric contribution to the landscape is small. (Hoskins 1955: 1)

It was not until the 1960s that the real richness of the archaeological resource on the lowlands away from the chalk was recognised. This was paradoxically because archaeological sites were being lost at an unprecedented rate by a huge programme of development such the building of the motorway network and the construction of the New Towns with the associated need for sand and gravel. Hoskins acknowledged this change in the introduction to the revised edition of 1977 where he stated ‘Everything is older than we think’ (Hoskins 1977).

Ridgeways

The consequence of the belief in the impassability of the ‘damp oakwood’ was that the only way that people, goods and ideas could move between the chalk downs was by using the ‘ridgeways’ that connected the areas of chalk. These were long-distance trade routes marked out by the upstanding archaeology of all periods from the Neolithic to Roman periods that generally followed the ridges of higher ground. These ancient routes could be shown by plotting the standing archaeology of all periods on a map. They were vital in another way as well because as all cultural change was caused by invasion and migration, they could be used to plot the movement and direction of cultural changes.

The discovery of these ancient roads and trackways, or possibly the archaeological invention of them, was a major interest to the fieldworkers of the early twentieth century. They not only fitted into the conception of the ancient landscape but appealed also to the interest in rediscovering the countryside. By the late Victorian and Edwardian period there was a strong nostalgia for a lost rural England that existed before the coming of the turnpike roads and the railways of the early nineteenth century. Industrialisation and urbanisation were perceived as the cause of the social problems of the late Victorian world and there was a strong desire to rediscover links back to a supposed simpler

and more natural world. Interestingly this back-to-nature movement (or movements) spanned the whole political spectrum from left to right. This was strengthened by the First World War, leading to an increased interest in the countryside and the formation of organizations dedicated to both conserving the landscape and to opening it up for leisure. The countryside was seen as decaying and in need of revitalisation. When Harold Peake wrote *The English Village* in 1922 (Peake 1922) it was subtitled *The Origins and Decay of its Community; An Anthropological Interpretation*. Here, Peake linked past to present and argued for new planned villages to halt rural depopulation.

The attempt to rediscover the ancient tracks and pathways of the countryside was just one aspect of this ruralism. There were a whole series of popular books on the ancient roads and trackways of England, such as Hilaire Belloc's *The Old Road* and Julia Cartwright's *The Pilgrim's Way from Winchester to Canterbury* (Cartwright 1911), both published in 1911 and Edward Thomas' *The Icknield Way* of 1913 (Thomas 1916). One very influential example, R. Hippisley Cox's *Green Roads of England* (Cox 1973), was first published in 1914 and is worth exploring in more detail.

Hippisley Cox was an amateur archaeologist and friend of Harold Peake. Hippisley Cox believed that Wessex was the centre of prehistoric Britain and the centre of Wessex was Avebury which was the site of a 'Sun temple', which sounds odd today but was an unexceptional view in 1914. For Hippisley Cox all prehistoric trackways lead to Avebury and the Celtic conquest, which he equated with the Bronze Age, was a step back from Neolithic Sun worship to a 'demonic' Druidism. For Hippisley Cox the Wessex centred trackways must have begun in the Neolithic. *The Green Roads of England* was a long lived and influential book, which had a considerable afterlife. I have a copy of the 1973 edition, which is a straight unannotated reprint of the 1923 text. It was issued as part of a series of reprints by the Garnstone Press to take advantage of the growth of interest in 'New Age' ideas in the 1970s. In the same series there were reprints of books such as John Mitchel's *The View over Atlantis* and the perennial fringe favourite Alfred Watkins' *The Old Straight Track*. As the cover of this edition of *The Green Roads of England* states:

...this well illustrated book provides detailed evidence for the existence in the Stone Age of a system of travel ways around England, which was systematically created along watersheds, with earthworks to protect them.

Hippisley Cox noted that movement along trackways could be controlled easily by earthworks, by which he meant monuments of varying date from Neolithic causewayed camps to Iron Age hillforts. He then started to map the paths of these trackways by the existence of earthworks and it became a familiar circular argument where a map of trackways became a map of earthworks and vice-versa.

This obsession with tracing the ancient routeways continued up to the 1960s. One of the last examples of this small industry is *The Ancient Trackways of Wessex* (Timperley

and Brill 1965). The work is very derivative, where the introduction is a summary of the views of Fox on the isolation of the chalk downs by impassable forest. The rest of the book is a simple list and description of trackways all taken as ‘ancient’ with no evidence presented for their actual age. There is a presumption that any trackway must be prehistoric. While not seemingly noticed by archaeologists, a review of the book in the *Geographical Journal* (Wood 1965) noted how outdated this book was.

This system of trackways was considered as being both ancient and timeless, as important in the post-Roman period as it was in the prehistoric period. The long-distance paths were still seen as the main ways to travel in the early medieval period, even though the Roman road system was still in place. As an example, in the first edition of *The Ordnance Survey map of the Dark Ages*, Crawford omits the Roman road system entirely except for the road between Canterbury and London while showing the presumed prehistoric system of trackways. This omission was noted as far back at 1936 by ‘H.C.D.’ in an anonymous review of the map in the *Geographical Journal* (H.C.D. 1936).

The romantic view of the long-distance ancient trackways persists today. In a recent work on the Pilgrim’s Way, Derek Bright (2011) dispels many myths about this possible ancient trackway from Winchester to Canterbury but still regards it as predating the medieval period.

The linear earthworks fitted neatly into this picture. If the only way to travel through this ‘jungle’ landscape was along the comparatively narrow ridgeways, then it would have been relatively easy to block or control movement of any invaders or traders along these trackways by building dykes. This applied equally to the early medieval period as to the prehistoric period.

Research on the dykes

This brings us to research on the dykes in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the organisations specifically concerned with the dykes was the Committee on Ancient Earthworks and Fortified Enclosures or the earthworks committee as it was known informally. This was a self-appointed committee that was part of the Congress of Archaeological Societies, a body founded and coordinated by the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1888. The congress was meant to coordinate the work of local, regional, and national archaeological societies. Over time the Congress formed several subcommittees, one of which was the earthworks committee in 1901. Several of the Congress’s subcommittees split off to become separate organisation but the earthworks committee always remained part of the Congress, finally being amalgamated into the Congress’s Research Committee in 1931. Work was done in the 1930s to revise the classification of earthworks done by the committee, but the Second World War ended the activities of the Research Committee. In 1946, the Congress of Archaeological Societies was finally disbanded and replaced by a new organisation, the Council for British Archaeology.

The earthworks committee published a report for nearly every year of its existence, in the beginning as a separate publication and then later as part of the main report of the Congress. One of the achievements of the committee was to invent the neutral term 'linear earthwork' to replace the old descriptors such as 'covered way' or 'travelling earthwork' (Crawford 1953). The annual reports of the committee took a broad definition of 'earthwork' and covered sites of all periods, mainly listing the sites that had been damaged or destroyed and those that had been added to the list of scheduled ancient monuments. The Cambridgeshire Dykes, Wansdyke and Bokerley Dyke frequently appear in the reports. Occasionally an excavation note appeared such as this one for 1925:

'OXFORDSHIRE. Mr. Thurlow Leeds reports that a trench cut on the S. side of the S. Oxfordshire Grim's Dyke, about 200 yards W. of Icknield Way, revealed a ditch continuing the slope of the exposed rampart to a depth equal to a height of 13 feet vertical to the top of the rampart.'
(Andrews *et al.* 1926: 26)

The end of the Congress did not mean the end of interest in linear earthworks. In 1946, the same year as the Congress of Archaeological Societies was disbanded, the Society of Antiquaries of London decided that 'the study (primarily the survey) of boundary dykes and defensive linear earthworks shall be the major scheme of research to be sponsored by the Society' (Fox *et al.* 1946) and local archaeological societies should be encouraged to record linear earthworks. Sir Cyril Fox, then the president of the Society of Antiquaries, and B.St.J. O'Neil, the vice president, along with W.F. Grimes, wrote a paper on how local societies should record linear earthworks (Fox *et al.* 1946). Extensive reference was made to Fox's work in the 1920s on Offa's Dyke. The emphasis here was on mapping and survey with excavation very much a secondary objective.²

The Chilterns Grim's Ditches

Two specific cases of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch (or Ditches) and the Silchester Dykes show how the dykes were interpreted against this background of ridgeways and 'damp oakwood' and how that that created two spurious monuments.

The Chilterns stretch from Bedfordshire through Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire to the Thames in Oxfordshire. Here, the chalk soils are overlain in places by patches of clay with flints. In the soil models of the 1930s the clay with flints would have been unsuitable for prehistoric settlement while the lighter chalk soils would have been perfect for settlement. There are several linear earthworks along the escarpment, all called Grim's Ditch, and the trackway known as the Icknield Way runs along it.

² The only explicit acknowledgement I have found that local societies followed this encouragement was the work on the Fossditch by the Norfolk Archaeological Society in the 1950s (Clarke 1955) though other work may have been inspired by this call.



GRIM'S DITCH IN BERKSHIRE AND THE CHILTERNS

facing p. 168

Figure 1: Crawford's map of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch system from *Antiquity* 1931, reproduced with permission of *Antiquity* (Crawford 1931) (see also Malim this volume)

O.G.S. Crawford was the first to consider the dykes across the Chiltern escarpment as part of a single system in a paper published in *Antiquity* in 1931 titled 'The Chiltern Grim's Ditches' (Crawford 1931). Here Crawford presents the Grim's ditches as purely a mapping problem, ignoring any interpretation as to their age or purpose, which he leaves to M. W. Hughes in an article published in the next issue of *Antiquity*. He also noted that the map of these dykes 'will also appear in due course on the *Ordnance Map of Anglo-Saxon Britain*, now in preparation'.³ Here Crawford is frustratingly vague on detail, stating that 'nearly all of the Grim's ditches of Wessex had been traced' and that the information will be used for the 5th edition of the 1" maps of the Ordnance Survey. He notes that some of the earthworks are prehistoric in date but others fall into the period AD 350–700. Crawford notes that excavation is needed to distinguish them but he never gives any indication of how the distinction between them was made or any criteria for

³ Interesting to note this early reference to what would become the OS Map of Britain in the Dark Ages – which finally appeared in 1938.

separating post-Roman and prehistoric dykes. Crawford was presenting himself as a detached observer, giving the basic facts that M.W. Hughes was to interpret later.

Figure 1 reproduces Crawford's (1931) map from the article. The dykes making up the Chiltern Grim's Ditch system, each separately called Grim's Ditch, were the Aldworth Grim's Ditch, the Mongewell or South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch and the Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire Grim's Ditch. This last monument Crawford considered to be originally a single monument which he then split into four parts. All of these ditches were dated by their relation to the ridgeway and Roman road and were seen as defences to prevent movement along the Icknield Way though Crawford found himself 'baffled' that the Aldworth Grim's Ditch commits 'tactical suicide' by descending into a valley at one point.

'Grimsditch and Cuthwulf's Expedition to the Chilterns in AD 571' by Michael W. Hughes (Hughes 1931), which appeared in the following issue of *Antiquity*, is a disappointing read after the build-up given to it by Crawford in the previous number. Hughes' aim was to support the account of the Saxon invasions as given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, suggesting the initial invasion was directed from the south into Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, against E.T. Leeds's arguments based on archaeological finds suggesting a movement along the Icknield Way from East Anglia (Leeds 1925). The paper is mainly argued from a typological argument of the dates of objects, providing dates for early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Buckingham and Bedfordshire. Hughes argues that the dates given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are correct and it can be regarded as an historic record of the coming of the Saxons. References in Hughes' article to the Chiltern Grim's Ditch are few and they are incidental to the main arguments not a main part of it. Hughes regarded the Grim's Ditch as marking the boundaries of Cuthwulf's conquest. In Hughes' view the Saxons came from south of the Thames into the Chilterns and so the Chiltern Grim's ditch would be a Saxon work to prevent attack from the north.

Subsequently, in 1934, Mortimer Wheeler published a paper in *The Antiquaries Journal* (Wheeler 1934) which inverted the whole idea of the Grim's Ditch and suggested that the ditches marked out the territory of post-Roman London. Instead of a Saxon defence against the British north of the Grim's ditch, he suggested they were built by the Saxons coming from the north as boundary markers, who were prevented from moving further south by a British polity based on the former territory of Roman London.

Wheeler had suggested that London was the centre of a British post-Roman community and political unit. The lack of early Saxon finds in the London area was noted in the catalogue of Saxon finds he compiled for the London Museum (Wheeler 1935). He suggested the Chiltern Grim's ditches formed part of the outer defence of London, constructed either to protect from Anglo-Saxon invaders or to mark out the boundary between Britons and Saxons. Wheeler also equated the ancient hunting rights of Londoners which covered an area consisting of 'Middlesex, Hertfordshire and all

Chiltern and all Kent as far as the Cray’, granted by Henry I in the twelfth century with the former territorium of Roman London. He argued that these rights were unique and extended back beyond the conquest to the Saxon period and brought in two further linear earthworks, the *Faesten dic* in Kent (see also Doyle White 2020) and the *Fullinga dic* in Surrey as the south and western boundaries of this suggested London centred unit. The Grim’s Ditch near Pinner, Middlesex was also considered as a part of this system by Wheeler, but he is not clear if it was contemporary with the Chiltern Grim’s ditches or marked a later development due to a penetration of Saxon invaders along the river valleys closer to London.

Wheeler uses mainly an environmental argument for the dating of the dykes. He notes that the Chiltern Grim’s Ditch lies on clay soil. The clay subsoil is always on the London side and the ditch stops where the poorer soil starts. For Wheeler this was the crucial dating evidence – as in the prehistoric period farmers were not able to work the heavy soils of the river valleys, Wheeler firmly states that ‘Our dykes can at least have nothing to do with prehistoric Britain’ so must be of Saxon date. Wheeler also saw the dykes as part of a single system ‘Their essential unity is disguised by their intermittency’. That is the dyke is a single monument but not a continuous one, as opposed the Crawford’s view that the dyke was once much greater in extent and that some sections were once joined up. This paper was mostly speculation and no excavation on the dykes was done, though an attempt was made to trace the line of the Pinner Grim’s Ditch. Wheeler just suggested this idea and never went back to it or published anything else on early medieval earthworks.

It was not until the excavation work of Dyer (1963) that the unity and date of the Chiltern Grim’s Ditch was really questioned. He showed that the Berkhamstead Grim’s ditch was much more extensive than Crawford had showed in his plan of the Grim’s Ditches and that parts of the earthwork are cut by Roman roads. The dykes are all built with the bank on the downward side of the slope, which would make them much more likely to be boundary markers than efficient defensive earthworks.

Slightly later Bradley (1969) considered the other end of the Chiltern system at, the south Oxfordshire Grim’s Ditch at Mongewell on the north bank of the Thames. Bradley noted the Streatley Ditch on south side of Thames had been linked to the Mongewell Ditch but, as Bradley points out, the ditches face in opposite directions and have a gap of five miles between the points where the ditches reach the Thames. Each of the ditches have a different form of construction. This strongly suggests an Iron Age date for these earthworks.

By the time a second edition of *The Ordnance Survey Map of Britain in the Dark Ages* was published in 1966 (Ordnance Survey 1966), the Chiltern Grim’s Ditch was removed from the map because it was ‘probably’ Iron Age in date. However, the map still considered the ditches to form a unified system. Subsequently, the dykes have been considered to be part of the Iron Age frontier along the Thames along with a series of hillforts and oppida, for example in Lambrick’s work on the Thames frontier (Lambrick 1998; see also Malim 2010).

The Chiltern Grim's Ditch began as no more than a suggestion that a series of dykes formed a monument that was possibly continuous. It was Mortimer Wheeler's theorising that expanded it into a vast defensive ring around London. Once excavation established that parts of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch were certainly prehistoric in date it dissolved back to a series of disconnected earthworks. Though the idea of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch as the northern boundary of post-Roman London was still being discussed as late as 1983 (Merrifield 1983).

The Silchester Dykes

The second chimera for consideration is the collective known as the Silchester Dykes. North-west of the Roman town of Silchester (Callewa Atrebatum), close to the hamlet of Padworth, and between two Roman roads that lead out of the town, there is an earthwork known as Grim's Bank. A second section of dyke lies to the east of the Dorchester road and is also referred to as Grim's Bank.

The origin of the idea that these dykes form a defence of the post-Roman town can be traced back to 1915 in an early article by O.G.S. Crawford called 'Anglo-Saxon bounds of land near Silchester' which was published in *The Antiquary* (Crawford 1915)⁴. It is not known when Crawford managed to write this paper. He had returned to England from fieldwork in the Sudan just before the outbreak of the First World War and then joined a territorial army battalion and was serving in France by December 1914. By early 1915 he had been invalided home from France and had begun officer training. It seems unlikely that he could have spent any time on any archaeological work once the war began and does not refer to any such work in the published paper.

The paper describes the bounds of the parish of Brimpton, in Berkshire, and the parishes of Baughurst and Tadley, both in Hampshire, and attempts to follow them on the ground. The boundary charters had been published in the *Cartulariui in Saxonicum* by Walter de Gray Birch between 1885 and 1893 (Birch 1885) and Crawford was working from these published descriptions. These parishes are all to the west of the site of Silchester, from two to five miles (3–8km). Bury's Bank on Greenham Common is even further away, about eleven miles (17km) to the north-west of Silchester, just south of Newbury. Describing an existing path along the edge of Greenham and Crookham Common, which Crawford calls a non-Roman highway:

At right angles to its course there are at least five ancient ditch-and-bank earthworks. Four of them are at the eastern end, between the Traveller's Friend and the school 1,200 yards west of it. The fifth and

⁴ The Antiquary: 'A Magazine Devoted to the Study of the Past' was a popular magazine with a mix of articles on general historical subjects including archaeology, heraldry, antiques, and news covering topics such as auction prices for silver and paintings as well as book reviews. It ceased publication in 1915. The journal Antiquity was founded by O.G.S. Crawford in 1928 and clearly follows the popular style of The Antiquary, though concentrating on archaeological matters.

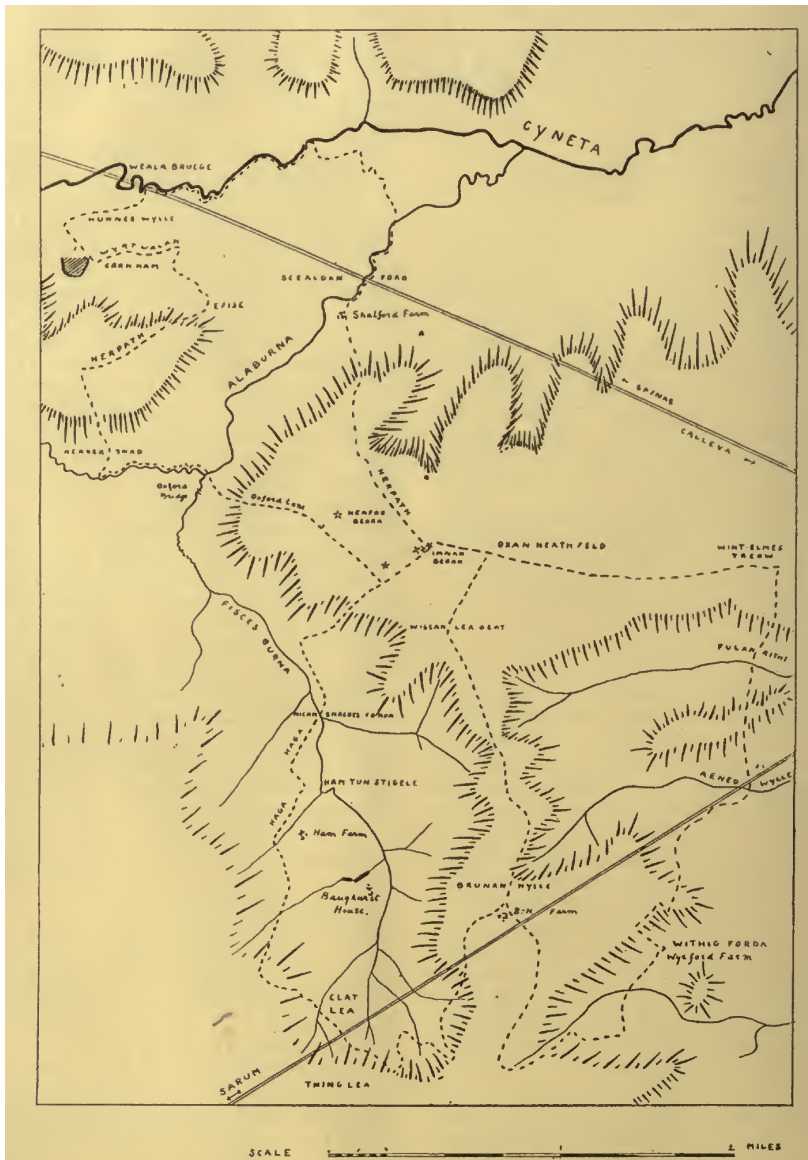


Figure 2: Crawford's map of Anglo-Saxon boundaries near to Silchester (Crawford 1915)

largest, called Bury's Bank, is at the western end, near Greenham Lodge. All of them have the ditch on the west side, and all run from the head of a swampy gully on the north to the heads of similar gullies on the south. They are perhaps of the same character as the Cambridgeshire dykes and others dug across the Icknield Way. A similar bank runs diagonally across Snelsmore Common north of Newbury. Their presence anywhere goes far to prove the existence of an old highway at right angles to their direction. Here we have corroborative evidence of a highway in Saxon times. The ditches are probably of sub-Roman origin. (Crawford 1915)

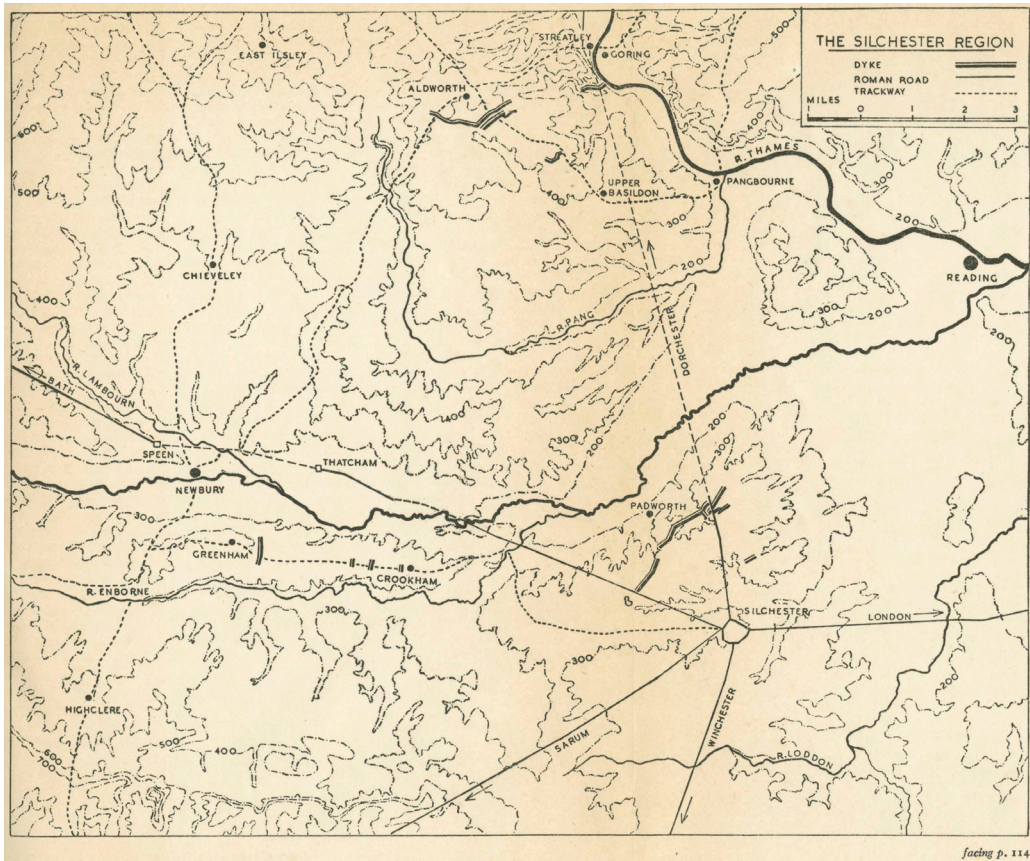


Figure 3: Map of Silchester Dyke system from *Antiquity* 1944, by permission of *Antiquity* (O'Neil 1944)

Crawford does not show these banks on his map (Figure 2) where Crawford uses the presence of the banks and ditches as evidence to prove the existence of the pathway, and its date is considered to be sub-Roman.

Nothing more was done until the 1940s when Crawford's suggestion that Bury's Bank was post-Roman became treated as a hard 'fact' (O'Neil 1944). It is worth examining the details of the 1940 excavation as a huge mass of interpretation has been hung on the results of this single excavation.

The land at Greenham Common had been acquired by the RAF for a new airfield and Bury's Bank (alternatively spelt as Berry's Bank) lay directly under the site of the new runway. In a quick salvage excavation at least four trenches were cut across the bank, but the published description is not clear. It was amazing that anything could have been achieved under such difficult conditions and the records and the finds are now lost, and the only record of the excavation seems to be the published paper in the *Archaeological Journal*. The excavation was organised by W.E. Harris, the curator of Newbury Museum, but it was published by Bryan St John O'Neil and Harold Peake as 'A Linear Earthwork on Greenham Common, Berkshire' (O'Neil and Peake 1943).

The finds from the excavation were meagre, comprising two sherds of Roman pottery found in the fill of the ditch. The dating of Bury's Bank should have depended on these two sherds of pottery, the latest of which was fourth century, showing that the ditch was filling up after this. Obviously, this would not fit with the idea of a post-Roman series of defences. A way around this problem was O'Neil's suggestion that a ditch would not remain open long in the light sandy soil of Greenham Common and the pottery had subsequently fallen into the ditch from the bank and so the monument was of post-Roman date. Here the presupposition of a post-Roman date had forced the evidence to be explained away to fit the idea not the other way around.

Despite his heavy workload, O'Neil managed to publish two articles in 1943 about the Silchester area, the aforementioned Greenham Common article and a further one on 'Grim's Bank, Padworth, Berkshire' in *Antiquity* (O'Neil 1943). This second *Antiquity* article describes an undated excavation on Grim's Bank close to Silchester which produced no dating evidence, but the shape of the ditch is used to compare it to Bury's Bank and to date it to the same sub-Roman phase. The following year, he published a general article on 'The Silchester Region in the 5th & 6th centuries AD' in *Antiquity* (O'Neil 1944). It was in this paper that the ideas were brought together and the Silchester Dykes as a system were created. In a footnote in this paper O'Neil states:

In the absence of archaeological proof, they [*the dykes*] may be dated to this period tentatively by comparison with similar works elsewhere (e.g. Wansdyke). (O'Neil 1944)

As the crucial argument, O'Neil draws in Bury's Bank as a far-flung component of the whole Silchester Dyke system and uses it to date the whole system. The implicit assumption is that the dykes all form a coherent system of the same date.

Finally, there is the linear earthwork on Greenham Common, two miles southeast of Newbury, and its companions on Crookham Common two miles further east. The former has been shown by excavation to be sub-Roman, and the latter are likely to be of the same date. (O'Neil 1944)

O'Neil's map (1944; Figure 3) shows the extent of this whole Silchester system. There is a problem which O'Neil admits, that Bury's Bank does not block a Roman road. However, he argues that it blocks a trackway that was used as an alternative when the Roman Road on the north bank of the Thames went out of use, either through lack of maintenance or because it was too dangerous to use. Using Bury's Bank in this way raises another difficulty, which O'Neil admits to but does not provide any explanation for. Bury's Bank faces westwards, suggesting an enemy to the west, while any possible Saxon threat would have more likely come from the north and east. Since the publication of O'Neil's paper his idea of the Silchester Dyke system has hardened into a fact. Despite excavations on Grim's Bank by Astill in 1978, which found no evidence of a post-Roman date (Astill 1979), the presence of earthworks are still used to support the idea that there

was a substantial fifth or sixth century occupation of the city (Frere 1987; Dark 2000). The more distant earthworks which are likely to be Iron Age or Roman in date are used to date the dykes closer to Silchester. Modern discussions about the Silchester Dykes concentrate on the Grim's Bank close to Silchester while the more distant earthworks are no longer considered as part of the system of the Silchester Dykes. The latest work from the Silchester Environs project (Fulford *et al.* 2016) show that though a post-medieval date for the Silchester Dykes cannot be completely ruled out it is very unlikely.

Into the later twentieth century

A second edition of *The Ordnance Survey Map of the Dark Ages* was published in 1966 (Ordnance Survey 1966). The new edition was needed because of the vast increase in knowledge since the 1930s, though it was still dominated by O.G.S. Crawford's ideas. The Roman road network was now shown on the map. Despite this improvement the second edition of map could be considered a step back on the first edition, with its confident division of the dykes into a series of 'British' and 'Saxon' linear earthworks echoing Victorian-era visions. There is no information about how this division was made or any criteria for such a division. The Silchester Dykes were omitted from the map along with the earthworks around Colchester, Chichester, and St Albans on the ground they were all most likely to be Iron Age in date.⁵

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the view of lowland Britain as a landscape of dense woodland disappeared gradually and there was no sudden overnight revolution. Instead there was a slow deflation of the model. The growth of environmental archaeology, especially palynology, and systematic programmes of aerial photography and field-walking all slowly eroded the view of a dense jungle covered and uninhabited lowland. As this view changed the view of the function of the ridgeways changed. Some ridgeways such as the Jurassic Way were regarded as spurious while views of the remaining ones like the Icknield Way changed. Instead of being seen as narrow corridors where movement could be tightly controlled, they became 'zones of communication', vague and ill-defined routes through the landscape.

While prehistorians had a continuing interest in linear earthworks and land divisions (Bradley *et al.* 1994) the remaining linear earthworks of the early medieval period now fell between the interests of specialists in the late Roman and early medieval periods. This was due to the rise of the more specialised archaeologist with a deeper but narrower period view. Fox and Crawford had both looked at the landscape as a totality, from prehistory to the medieval period long before the rise of landscape archaeology. It was almost a timeless view of the English landscape where Roman invasion could

⁵ The prehistoric date of the Chichester entrenchments was confirmed by Bradley's fieldwork in the late 1960s (Bradley 1971). The date of the Colchester earthworks as Iron Age had been proved by excavation as far back as the 1930s when Hawkes had begun his investigations but not published until 1947 (Hawkes and Hull 1947; Hawkes and Crummy 1995).

be considered a brief interlude. This relative neglect left the old interpretations of the dykes unchallenged even though the background had changed radically, and the dykes were still seen as defending narrow ridgeways.

Present and future work

The twentieth century ended with something of a slump in the studies of early medieval linear earthworks but there has been a revival of interest in the first part of the twenty-first century. This is partly due to an increased number of excavations undertaken as part of the planning process as well as an increasing number of LiDAR and aerial surveys. Squatriti put the dykes into their European context (Squatriti 2002, 2004) while two articles by Malim (2007, 2010) provided useful summaries of the state of research into the dykes. My book (Bell 2012) was an attempt to untangle the linear earthworks, to separate the certain prehistoric examples from the post-Roman ones and to bring together results of recent excavations. Meanwhile, building on a discrete tradition of work on the dykes of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands (see Williams and Delaney 2019 for a recent review), Ray and Bapty (2016) concentrated on Offa's Dyke and the related earthworks. Fortunately, the linkage between dykes and the routeways has been broken if not completely severed (Malim 2010), but certainly the 'grand narrative' of Fox and Crawford has been finally rejected.

Looking to the future there is a huge potential for further work on the dykes. The most crucial work that needs to be done is to refine the chronology of the dykes by dating the undated ones. The potential for getting better dating is shown by the use of Optically-Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating on the Scots' Dyke at Scotch Corner (Hounslow and Karloukovski 2013) and the use of multiple Radiocarbon dates on the West Yorkshire Grim's Ditch (Roberts *et al.* 2001). Recent work on dating field systems in Cornwall have shown that optically stimulated luminescence profiling and dating (OSLPD) can be used as a rapid technique to date monuments in the field (Vervust *et al.* 2020).

The other recent advance that is promising for large monuments like linear earthworks is the ability to combine a variety of geophysical and remote sensing techniques together to map a landscape in three dimensions. One example is the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project (Gaffney *et al.* 2012) which surveyed approximately 8km² of the Stonehenge landscape using multiple geophysical techniques. Collection of these large sets of data is now much easier, but perhaps more importantly so is the ability to process and visualise these data sets. The application of these techniques should hopefully open new conceptual landscapes as well as the new data one.

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The 'Wall of Severus': Pseudoarchaeology and the West Mercian Dykes

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The dates and purposes of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke have long been a subject of debate among historians and archaeologists. This paper examines and critiques several of the more unusual claims made over the past century. Prominence is given to the use of ancient literature and widespread misunderstandings of scientific dating techniques, both of which have been used to suggest a Roman date for the origin of the dykes close to the modern Anglo-Welsh border.

Keywords: Bad Archaeology, ley lines, prehistoric canals, pseudoarchaeology, revisionist history, Roman *limes*, scientific dating.

Introduction

Pseudoarchaeology – otherwise known as Fringe Archaeology or Bad Archaeology – is a phenomenon that continues to affect public discourse about the past profoundly. Focusing primarily on places outside the West (as broadly conceived), and thus at least partly a persistent dimension of European colonial legacies, it has relatively rarely focused on sites in Britain. Striking exceptions exist, however, notably Stonehenge (Hawkins 1963; Michell 1969; Menzies 2012: 229–242), Royston Cave (Beamon 1992; Houldcroft 2008) and the web of ley-lines promiscuously linking sites of disparate date (Watkins 1922, 1925). These have been the focus of populist speculations that go well beyond what the academic mainstream will accept. Yet, in contrast to the glaringly fantastical claims made about archaeological sites, monuments and material cultures found elsewhere across the globe, anyone claiming that (for example) ancient aliens built Hadrian's Wall, or that a colony of Peruvian Inka refugees was responsible for the Tower of London, would be given short shrift, even in venues where fact-checking is not the norm. William Corliss's Sourcebook Project aimed 'to provide libraries and individuals with a wide selection of reliable descriptions of unusual artifacts' (Corliss 1978, preface). In 774 pages of text derived mainly from nineteenth and early twentieth-century journals, he included only 28 British and Irish sites. Stonehenge accounts for no fewer than six of these.

Concurrently, there have been no shortage of books and articles addressing and critiquing the claims of pseudoarchaeologists. Science-fiction writer Lyon Sprague de Camp (1907–2000), who coined the terms 'extraterrestrial' and 'ET', wrote an early analysis of the modern Atlantis myth (de Camp 1954). A later book, co-written with his wife, dealt with twelve well-known 'unsolved puzzles' (de Camp and de Camp 1964).

Francis Harrold and Raymond Eve's (1995) publication of papers from a symposium held in 1985 was a rare attempt to quantify the impact of fringe beliefs about the past. Garrett Fagan's (2006) edited collection also took a thematic overview that touched on the postmodernist denial of objectivity and the search for alternative voices. Peter James and Nick Thorpe's (1999) *Ancient Mysteries* dealt with individual 'mysteries', much like my own Bad Archaeology website (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020). Others, such as Ronald Fritze's (2009) *Invented Knowledge* cast the net more widely to deal with the strain of anti-intellectualism that has become commonplace in Western cultures. Ken Feder's (2019) *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries* is now in its ninth edition, demonstrating a continuing need for such texts, although I am doubtful that followers of fringe beliefs ever read books of this sort. Most recently, an issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record* tackled pseudoarchaeology in the Americas and worldwide (e.g. Anderson 2019). Yet some archaeologists continue to debate engaging with proponents of alternative histories, such as Anna Simandiraki-Grimshaw and Eleni Stefanou's (2012) *From Archaeology to Archaeologies* which unusually invited a contribution from Hindu Creationist Michael Cremo. Tera Pruitt's (2012) analysis of the supposed pyramids at Visoko in Bosnia, 'discovered' by Semir Osmanagić, canvassed reactions to his presentation at Lund, organised by Cornelius Holtorf, an archaeologist who has occasionally engaged with pseudoarchaeologists.

Notwithstanding this extensive literature debunking and critiquing pseudoarchaeologies, archaeology is a rare discipline that welcomes the input of amateurs, who are often able to make significant discoveries, and new interpretations of old data. There is no conspiracy of university professors who knock back any suggestions that do not fit into their preconceived notions about the past, although many fringe writers claim precisely this. Nevertheless, there is an undercurrent of possibly wilful misunderstanding in the way the archaeological past is treated by some; this frequently appears to be designed as a means of courting controversy. Often, ancient places are framed by the media in terms of 'insoluble mysteries' that have been resolved by new discoveries, requiring us to 'rewrite history'. As a recent example, *The Daily Express* of 25 February 2020 carried the headline: Archaeology shock: China's Terracotta Army discovery 'to rewrite history books'. This one example could be multiplied many times over. Bad Archaeology is pervasive, apt to grab headlines and its prevalence forms part of the early 21st-century cultural zeitgeist, with its characteristic widespread mistrust of experts.

The public perception of the period between the collapse of Roman administration and the Norman Conquest continues to regard it as the 'Dark Ages'. Narratives based on outdated racial concepts bring scientific evidence in the form of DNA analyses to bear on the period (Manco 2015: 217 ff; 241 ff); books that were widely criticised in their day (such as John Morris's (1973) *The Age of Arthur*) remain in print; there is a time lag between academic discourse and its public promotion (Williams 2020: 3). Archaeology has long been used to underpin politicised narratives of ethnicity, nationhood and

individuality (Arnold 2006: 174); early medieval archaeology has hardly been exempt (see e.g. Williams 2020). A manifestation of these trends is the newly popular image of the female Viking warrior (Williams and Alexander 2019: 73), a character whose existence is hotly debated but whose depiction in popular culture is widespread.

Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke have not been altogether immune from the attentions of 'independent thinkers'. Their associations with English narratives of conquest, warrior kings and their linear character may be contributory factors to this. Both have seen efforts to redate their construction, sometimes drastically, including by professional archaeologists. The results of their fieldwork and scientific dating, as channelled through the media, can appear revolutionary. An initially enthusiastic uptake of these ideas by Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (2000) resulted in a bizarre work of pseudohistory that recast the geography of early medieval Britain into Wales and the Marches. The author contends that the uncritical promotion of claims of revolutionary new dates by mainstream media and their dissemination via social networks undermines public understanding of the past. It creates a sense of mistrust in those involved professionally in investigating it, which reinforces the commonplace political narratives that deny the reliability of experts.

There has also been an attempt to recast the nature of Offa's Dyke as a canal (Langdon 2014). Perhaps this picked up on Fox's (1995: 251–253) observation that a 2km stretch of the River Morda had been straightened artificially at the southern end of Wat's Dyke. Fox's view was confirmed by the recognition of a previously unknown section of Dyke to its south in 1985 (Youngs *et al.* 1986: 150), demonstrating that early medieval societies in Britain had the capabilities and desire to undertake hydraulic engineering. John Blair and others (Blair 2007: 6) have drawn attention to other evidence for artificial and modified waterways from the middle of the early medieval period onwards. However, Langdon's imagined Offa's Dyke is not early medieval in date but prehistoric. Meanwhile, his identification of it as a canal is based on his assessment of the meaning of the word *dyke*, which he derives from Dutch *dijk* (Langdon 2014: loc 97).

To understand how some writers have aimed to redate the dykes of the Welsh Marches, we need first to examine mainstream assumptions. If writers such as Blake, Lloyd and Langdon are found to have made a convincing case, archaeologists must be open to the possibility that the consensus dating may be wrong. It is widely recognised that the conventional dates for these earthworks rest on slender archaeological and documentary evidence. Moreover, the published scientific dates have seemed to some to warrant a radical reassessment of the accepted dates.

The conventional dates

Documentary sources

There are no strictly contemporary sources mentioning the construction of Offa's Dyke. It is not noticed in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the difficulties in constructing

an historical narrative of Offa's reign in the absence of Mercian chronicles or histories have long been recognised (Stenton 1971: 206; Whitehead 2018: 86). Asser's *de Rebus Gestis Ælfredi* 14 (Stevenson 1959: 12) contains the earliest reference to the Dyke: *fuit in mercia moderno tempore quidam strenuus rex atque uniuersis circa se regibus et regionibus finitimis formidolosus rex, nomine offa, qui uallum magnum inter britanniam atque merciam de mari usque ad mare fieri imperauit* ('In recent times there was a certain vigorous king in Mercia and a king most fearful to all the kings around him and the neighbouring regions, Offa by name, who ordered a great wall to be built between Britannia and Mercia, from sea to sea.'). Even if the minority view that the work was forged in Asser's name by Byrthferth of Ramsey c. AD 1000 (Smyth 2002: 202) is correct, this is still the earliest mention of the earthwork.

According to the *Brenhinedd y Saeson* (the mid-fourteenth-century version in British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra B.v and Gutun Owain's later fifteenth-century version in National Library of Wales MS 7006D (*Llyfr Du Basing*, 'The Black Book of Basingwerk')), D.CC.LXXXIIIJ. *yr haf y' diffeithws y' Kymre kyuoeth Offa. ac yna y' perys Offa gwneythur claud yn dervyn y' ryingthaw a Chymre, val y' bei haws y'daw gwrthnebu y' ruthyr y' elyneon, a hwnnw a elwit yn Glawd Offa yr hy'nny' hyd hedyw* ('In the summer, the Cymru ravaged the territory of Offa. And then Offa had a ditch made as a boundary between him and Wales, to enable him more easily to resist the attack of his enemies, and it was called *Clawdd Offa* from that day to this.'). The *Llyfr Du Basing* adds: *ac ef y sydd yn estynnv o'r mor y'r llall, nid amgen, o'r Dehev yn emyl Brvsto tv a'r Gogledd gorvchw y Fflint y rwng mynachloc Ddinas Basing a Mynydd y Glo* ('And it extends from one sea to the other, that is from the south near Bristol to the north beyond Flint, between the monastery of Basingwerk and Coleshill.'). These additions to an originally thirteenth-century composition are of uncertain value for this period when we do not know their sources. Jones (1971: 10) suggested that the chronicler's year DCCLXXXIIIJ should be for AD 783, although it is unclear why.

The *Vitae Offarum Duorum* produced in St Albans during the twelfth century mentions the Dyke twice. At folio 15^r, dealing with a truce at Christmas 775, we are told *Veruntamen cum nollent uel exercitus Regis Offę uel Walensium inde procul recedere, Rex Offa ad cautelam inter ipsos duos exercitus communi assensu unum fossatum longum nimis et profundum effodi, aggere terrestri uersus Wallenses eminenter elleuato, ne fallatium hostium irruptionibus repentinis preoccuparetur* ('Nevertheless, as both the army of King Offa and that of the Welsh were unwilling to withdraw far from there, as a precaution, King Offa had an extremely long and deep ditch dug by common consent between those two armies, an earthen mound highly raised against the Welsh, to prevent unexpected invasions by the deceptive enemy'). Shortly after, we are told *Cumque tempus lecitę et requiei die Natalis Domini totum exercitum Offanis immo totum mundum exhilarauit, nocte sequenti, uidelicet nocte beati Stephani, cum se cuncti Merciorum principes immo eciam excubitores nichil sinistri pertimescentes se secure sopori dederunt, ipsi reges Walensium Northanhimbrorum, Australium Saxonum, cum suis complicitibus, tota ipse opaca nocte, silenter et furtim magnam partem predictę fossę, officio rustocorum propere repleuerunt* ('And

when the time of leisure and rest of the Birthday of the Lord had cheered the whole Offan army – indeed, the whole word – on the following night, that is the night of Saint Stephen, when all the leaders of the Mercians, indeed even the guards, fearing nothing hostile, had given themselves with him to sleep in safety, the kings of those Welsh, Northumbrians and South Saxons, together with their accomplices, in that completely dark night, silently and furtively filled back in a great part of the aforementioned ditch, quickly in the manner of countrymen') (Swanton 2010: 67, 69). The work has been described charitably as one with 'no fixed boundary between fact and fiction' (Swanton 2010: ix), which helped to generate the legend of a pious and worthy founder of St Albans Abbey (Keynes 1999: 340–341).

At much the same time, Giraldus Cambrensis included a series of English kings who were victorious over the Welsh in his *Descriptio Kambrię* II.7. Part of the list includes Offa as the builder of the Dyke: *Sicut rex Offa suo in tempore qui et fossa finali in longum extensa, Britones ab Anglis exclusit...* ('just as King Offa, in his own day, shut out the Britons from the English even with a long ditch, the length of the frontier') (Dimock 1868: 217).

These few documentary sources – which appear to be independent of each other – are unanimous in ascribing the construction of the Dyke 'from sea to sea' to Offa, King of Mercia. This does not make the ascription true: we shall see that between the fourth and nineteenth centuries, the building of Hadrian's Wall (commencing in AD 122) was wrongly but unanimously ascribed to Septimius Severus for unknown reasons.

Wat's Dyke, on the other hand, has no documentary history whatsoever (Worthington 1999: 468). Its date has long been contentious, but the similarity in placement with Offa's Dyke – which it follows for a significant stretch only a few kilometres to the east – makes an early medieval and Mercian origin a strong possibility (Williams 2019: 45): this has been the consensus view for many years.

Archaeological evidence

Neither dyke is adequately dated archaeologically, except in terms of a *terminus post quem* in the Roman period. This has allowed speculation that the attribution of the larger monument to Offa is nothing more than a guess (Wat is more likely to be a figure of folklore than history (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2001)). Fox recovered 'numerous Roman artefacts and nothing which can be dated later than the Roman period. These artefacts (potsherds, pieces of tile, glass) are small and for the most part abraded' from the section he excavated at Ffrith in 1926 (Fox 1955: 40–44). This has usually been taken as a guarantee of a post-Roman origin for Offa's Dyke: the residual material deriving from the settlement (NPRN 275846) that may have been associated with lead mining and processing. The Offa's Dyke Project, run from the University of Manchester by David Hill and Margaret Worthington Hill from 1972 to the 2000s excavated a section that cut across a Roman marching camp at Brompton Hall, Shropshire, again providing a *terminus post quem* (Tyler 2011: 153).

Radiocarbon determinations have been made on samples from Plas Offa, Chirk (Grant 2014a: 18), discussed below. Secondary reports suggested that ‘radiocarbon dates in one section ranged from AD 430 to AD 652 and in another section from AD 887 to AD 1019’ (Belford 2017: 69). These are the sole scientific dates so far obtained from Offa’s Dyke.

The date of Wat’s Dyke has been somewhat better illuminated by archaeological investigations. In 1957, W.J. Varley excavated a section across the ditch of Wat’s Dyke at Mynydd Isa, where he recovered a broken annular loom-weight. It had been placed, apparently deliberately, on top of a patch of burnt clay that he interpreted as a hearth (Varley 1975–76: 135). The form of the weight is ‘Middle Saxon’, c. 650–800, placing the filling of the ditch after the mid-seventh century. The Dyke also pre-dates the motte at Erddig Park, dated to the twelfth century (Worthington Hill 2019: 69).

Furthermore, excavations at two locations on Wat’s Dyke, at Maes-y-Clawdd (also known as Mile Oak, Oswestry) and Gobowen, have yielded scientific dating evidence (Ray and Bapty 2016: 384). The former involved a radiocarbon sample from a hearth thought to have been in use before or at the time of the dyke’s construction (Hannaford 1998: 5); this is the date that has been used to suggest a fifth-century origin for the earthwork. The second has provided Optically Stimulated Luminescence determinations that have been taken to indicate construction in the late eighth or early ninth century (Malim and Hayes 2008: 164–165). The uses to which these dates have been put will be examined below.

The scientific dates make an early medieval origin for both dykes a near certainty. Nevertheless, Langdon (2014) was willing to dismiss all archaeological data to promote his prehistoric dating of Offa’s Dyke, while the seemingly precise date of AD 446 publicised by Nurse (1999) gave fringe writers ample opportunity to suggest alternative early medieval dates. Moreover, the imprecision of radiocarbon determinations and Optically Stimulated Luminescence measurements allows room to argue how they should be interpreted.

Not Offa’s Dyke but the ‘Wall of Severus’

The most startling claim to have been made is that Offa’s Dyke was built by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (AD 145–211). Late Antique writers, beginning in 360 with Aurelius Victor’s *Liber de Caesaribus*, credited him with building a wall across Britain during his military campaigns in the province, early in the third century. For many centuries, this was identified with the construction now generally credited to Hadrian (AD 76–138). In 2000, Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd equated the Severan frontier with the earthwork known as Offa’s Dyke. They supported this contention with the radiocarbon date associated with Wat’s Dyke first publicised by Keith Nurse (1999) in *History Today*, following a typically more cautious report from the archaeologist involved (Hannaford 1998: 8). Nurse reported the date as ‘around AD 446’, an impressively precise figure

for those not accustomed to dealing with radiocarbon determinations, uncalibrated or otherwise.

Blake and Lloyd (2000: 60–67; 141–142) marshalled principally literary evidence as well as a radical reanalysis of place-names to bolster their reattribution of the Dyke to Severus. There was minimal consideration of archaeological data. Their overall hypothesis – that the Arthurian legends refer to a real history that can be localised entirely within Wales – used the Dyke only as a small element. Furthermore, if their claims were to be accepted, they would involve a complete reassessment of our understanding of Late Antique and early medieval Britain.

They began with the premise that Geoffrey of Monmouth had translated *quondam britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum* ('a very old book of British speech') (Reeve and Wright 2007: 5) into Latin but misunderstood the original's place-names. Their reading of Geoffrey led them to propose an entirely new geography for early medieval Britain. According to them, texts referring to *Britannia* should be understood as referring only to Wales. They cited Asser's *de Rebus Gestis Ælfredi* 14, describing Offa's Dyke, which uses *Britannia* in opposition to *Mercia* (*inter britanniam atque merciam* ('between Britain and Mercia')) to show that this was standard usage of the term. However, Asser uses the same word to refer to the whole island in Chapter 49, where *mare meridianum... interluit galliam britanniamque* ('the southern sea flows between Gaul and Britain.'). Further, they proposed that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *insula britannia* ('the island Britannia') translates in Middle Welsh as *Ynys Prydain* ('the island Prydain (*Britannia*)'), and that *ynys* meant 'peninsula' rather than 'island'. They failed to cite any examples of this usage of the term and ignored the origin of Geoffrey's description of *Britannia* in the *Historia Brittonum*, whose author took it from Gildas (Curley 1994: 13), who in turn found it in Paulus Orosius.

They failed to follow through the implications of their toponymic hypotheses, which located Northumbria in the northern Welsh Marches (Blake and Lloyd 2000: 36); Bede would therefore have written in Shropshire (their *Bernica* (*sic*)). They placed the landing of Hengest and Horsa in Gwent (Blake and Lloyd 2000: 59) and identified *Glæstingaburh* not with Glastonbury Abbey but with Valle Crucis (Blake and Lloyd 2000: 181). These are just a selection of bizarre identifications from their '*new map of the original Kingdom of Britain*' (Blake and Lloyd 2000: 181). Figure 1 shows the extent of their zeal for relocating place-names that are usually considered well established.

Their reconfigured toponymy is the background to their reidentification of Offa's Dyke as 'the forgotten Wall of Severus' (Blake and Lloyd 2000: 67). If Hengest and Horsa were settled in Gwent, then the story in the *Historia Brittonum* 38 that Hengest's son and nephew, Octha and Ebissa should be given *regiones quae sunt in aquilone iuxta murum qui uocatur guaul* ('the regions which are in the north, next to the wall which is called Guaul') (Mommsen 1898: 179) refers to north-east Wales. This *guaul* must, therefore, be either

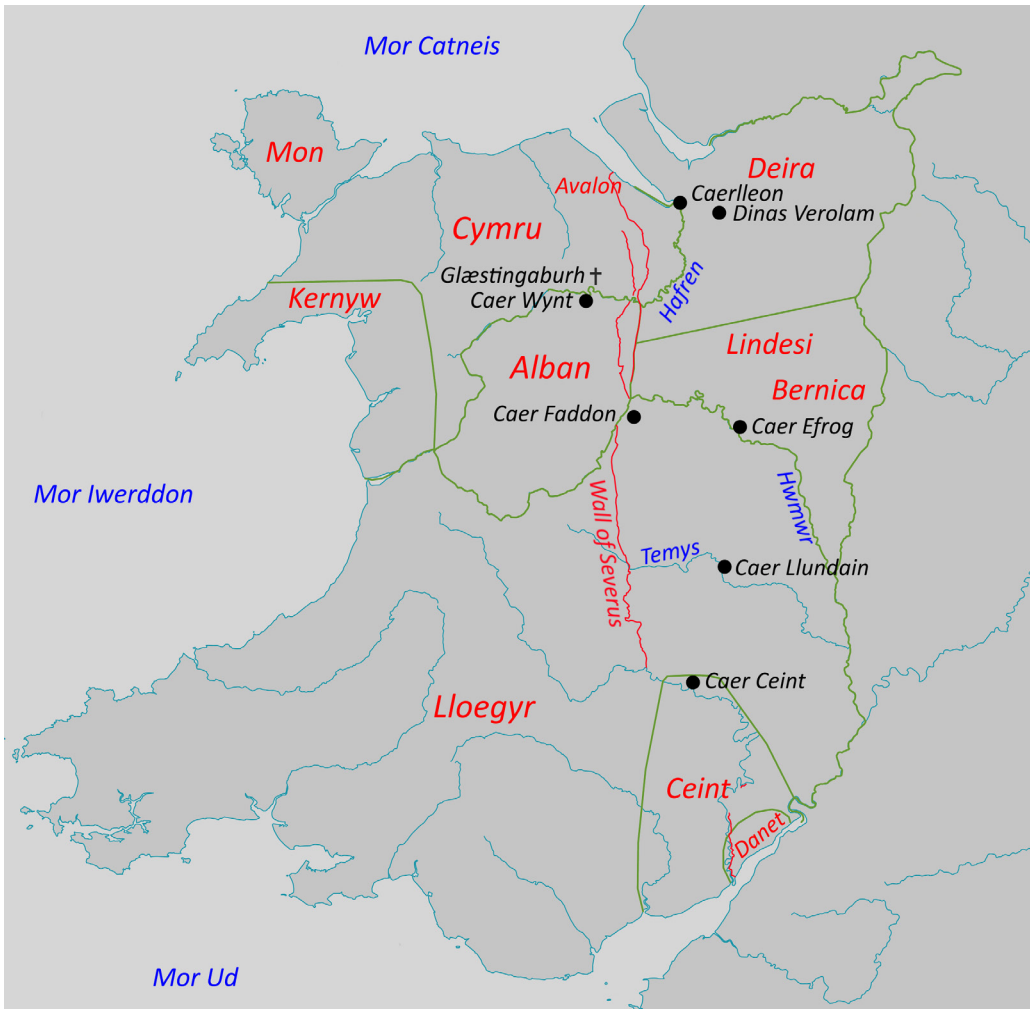


Figure 1: Blake and Lloyd's reimagined geography of Britannia (do not scale from this map and do not use it as reference for any ancient place-name)

Wat's Dyke or Offa's Dyke. They then identified this with the *murum et aggerem a mari usque ad mare per latitudinem britanniae, id est per CXXXII milia passuum* ('a wall and rampart from sea up to sea across the width of Britain, that is along 132 miles') of *Historia Brittonum* 23 (Mommsen 1898: 165), credited to Septimius Severus. They cited several Late Antique writers (Aurelius Victor *Liber de Caesaribus* XX.18, Eutropius *Historiae Romanae Breuiarium* VIII.19.1, 'Aelius Spartianus' (*Historia Augusta*) *Seuerus* XVIII.2, Hieronymus *Interpretatio Chronicae Eusebii ad Abraham* MMCCXXI, Paulus Orosius *Historia Aduersus Paganos* VII.17, Gildas *de Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* 14 and 18, Cassiodorus *Chronica* DCCCXCIII, Prokopios's (the name is more usually Latinised as Procopius) *Ὑπὲρ τῶν Πολέμων* ('About the wars') VIII.20 and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.5 and I.12) who refer to a wall built by Severus during his campaigns in Britain.

The earliest of these texts is Aurelius Victor's *Liber de Caesaribus*, published in 360. He stated: *his maiora aggressus britanniam, quo ad ea utilis erat, pulsus hostibus muro muniuit per transuersam insulam ducto utrimque ad finem oceani* ('setting out on a greater undertaking, after expelling the enemy, he fortified Britain with a wall, insofar as it was useful to it, leading across the breadth of the island, from one shore of the Ocean to the other'). The text is not specific about where in Britain Severus built his wall, except that it ran across the width of Britannia, implying an east-west alignment (Roman maps generally placed north at the top, in the modern manner). Aurelius Victor was the earliest writer to claim that Septimius Severus built a wall in Britain, over 140 years after that emperor's death; he was vague about the details, and we do not know what his source of information might have been.

Nine years later, Eutropius's *Historiae Romanorum Breviarium* supplied additional data, without appearing to derive directly from Aurelius Victor: *nouissimum bellum in britannia habuit, utque receptas prouincias omni securitate muniret, uallum per cxxxii passuum milia a mari ad mare deduxit* ('he had his last war in Britain, and so that he might fortify the recovered provinces with all security, he stretched a wall from sea to sea along 132 miles'). Here we see an absolute figure given for the length of the wall. Writing almost 160 years after the death of Severus, Eutropius was only the second writer to credit him with the construction of a wall and the first to give details of its length.

The next text to mention 'Severus's Wall' was the *Historia Augusta*. Although it claims to be the work of six separate authors writing under Diocletian or Constantine (i.e. 285–334), there is ample evidence that they are the product of a single author, writing in the reign of Theodosius I (379–395), as first proposed by Dessau (1892: 587). Computer analysis has shown that the texts cannot have been written by different individuals (Stover and Kestemont 2016: 154), while entire sections (in the lives of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus) have been taken bodily from Aurelius Victor and Eutropius. The statement about Severus's Wall is found in one of these plagiarised passages: *brittanniam, quod maximum eius imperii decus est, muro per transuersam insulam ducto utrimque ad finem oceani muniuit* ('he fortified Britain with a wall stretched across the island from one shore of Ocean to the other, which was the greatest achievement of his reign'). The passage shares a large number of words with Aurelius Victor, from which it is clearly derived. This is not evidence that the author of the *Historia Augusta* knew of three walls in Britain. Having correctly described walls built by Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, a source that he plagiarised (probably Aurelius Victor) mentioned one built by Severus, and he was in no position to contradict the source.

St Jerome's translation of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius added the passage from Eutropius almost verbatim, while Orosius's *Historia adversus paganos* appears to have used both Eutropius and Jerome. Gildas knew Orosius, and although his account of the Roman walls is very complex and very muddled (Dumville 1984: 63–64; George 2009: 49), it still allows only two, one of turf and the other of stone. He misdated both to the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Bede then copied Gildas as his only source of information

for the fifth century, thus giving the two post-Roman walls (*Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* I.12), but was also familiar with Orosius, so he gave the account of Severus's Wall. Aware of the problem he had created, he set out to correct the impression that Severus was responsible for building the stone wall: *non muro, ut quidam aestimant, sed uallo distinguendam putauit. murus etenim de lapidibus, uallum uero, quo ad repellendam uim hostium castra muniuntur, fit de cespitibus, quibus circumcises e terra uelut murus exstruitur super terram* ('he sought to distinguish it not with a wall, as some think, but with a rampart. For a wall is made with stones, but a rampart, by which forts are strengthened to repel enemy attack, is made with turves, cut from the ground, piled up above the ground like a wall').

It is likely that Bede, as a native of Jarrow, was familiar with Hadrian's Wall and the so-called vallum to its south; he probably assumed that the stone wall was built as a replacement for the earthwork vallum. Having learned from Gildas that the stone wall was a product of the fifth century and that the northern turf wall was late fourth- or early fifth-century, he concluded that the vallum must be the defensive work built by Septimius Severus. His explanation of the difference between *uallum* and *murum* is entirely his own. It suggests that he had seen not just Orosius, who wrote of a *uallum*, but also one of the earlier writers such as Eutropius or Aurelius Victor, who mentioned a *murum*, wrongly, in Bede's view. The *Historia Brittonum* (Chapter 23) used the same data as Bede, but whether the author got the information directly from Bede or from one of the earlier writers (he certainly was not using Gildas here) is not clear. The author added the detail that the wall had a British vernacular name, *guaul*, deriving from Latin *uallum* (Thomas and Bevan 1973: 1605) and suggesting that it was the term used locally to refer to the structure.

We thus have an entire history of Latin texts that are not independent witnesses to the building of a wall by Septimius Severus, but which go back to Eutropius, writing in 369. He may have rewritten the sentence in Aurelius Victor that is the first (that we know of) to claim that Severus built a wall in Britain. We do not know where Aurelius Victor got his information.

What of the figure of 132 miles? It is remarkably stable in the textual tradition, being quoted in this form from Eutropius onwards. The number *cxxxii* given originally by Eutropius does indeed mean 132 miles, but Latin numerals are open to corruption, and in manuscripts, *u* was often miscopied as *ii*, *x* as *u*, *c* as *l* and vice versa. If Eutropius had misread an unclear *l* as *c* in his source of information, we would be confronted with a wall *lxxxii* (in other words, 82) Roman miles long; Hadrian's Wall is 80 Roman miles long.

Other accounts of Severus's British campaigns

Two almost contemporary histories covering the reign of Severus have survived, by the Greek authors Cassius Dio Cocceianus and Herodian. The *Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία* ('Roman History') of Dio ran as far as 229, the year in which he held his second consulship, but most of the text is lost. Portions of it survive only as an *Ἐπιτομὴ τῆς Δίωνος τοῦ Νικαίας*

(‘Summary of Dio of Nicaea’) made by the Byzantine scholar Ioannes Xiphilinos in the eleventh century. Xiphilinos’s summary is, unfortunately, the only version to survive of Dio’s account of Severus’s British wars. However, from Xiphilinos (Ἐπιτομή 321) we learn that Severus campaigned against the Καληδόνιοι (*Caledonii*) and the Μαιάται (*Maiatae*), the latter of whom lived πρὸς αὐτῷ τῷ διατειχίσμτι, ὃ τὴν νῆσον διχῇ τέμνει (‘near the fortification, which cuts the island in two’). Herodian, whose τῆς μετὰ Μάρκον Βασιλείας Ἱστορία (‘History from the Emperor Marcus’), written c. 238, also located Severus’s campaigns in northern Britain. He mentioned (III.14.10) that they took place ὑπερβάνιος δὲ τοῦ στρατοῦ τὰ προβεβλημένα ρεύματά τε καὶ χώμαϊα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς (‘the army having crossed the defending rivers and also banks on the limit of Roman power’). This description of χώμαϊα, ‘banks’, is an apparent reference to the two existing defensive barriers. He does not mention the construction of any new earthworks or walls. A later, less careful writer may have mistaken Dio (whose actual words we do not have) or Herodian as saying that Severus had built one or other of the walls he is said to have crossed.

Prokopios and the Wall of Brittia

We still have to consider the rather bizarre account of Prokopios. He wrote several histories of the wars conducted by Justinian, which were eventually combined into a single book, Ὑπὲρ τῶν Πολέμων (‘About the wars’). He wrote (VIII.20.5):

Ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ τῇ Βριττία νήσῳ, τεῖχος ἐδείμαντο μακρὸν οἱ πάλαι ἄνθρωποι, δίχα τέμνον αὐτῆς πολλὴν τινα μοῖραν· ὅτι ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα, οὐχ’ ὁμοίως ἐφ’ ἐκάτερά ἐστι. τὰ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ τείχους πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἥλιον, εὐεξία τε ἀέρων ἐστὶ ξυμμεταβαλλομένη ταῖς ὥραις, θέρους μὲν μετρίως ἀλεινὴ, ψυχρινὴ δὲ χειμῶνος· καὶ ἄνθρωποι μὲν πολλοὶ ὥκηνται κατὰ ταῦτα βιοτεύοντες τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις, τὰ τε δένδρα καρποῖς ἐν ἐπιτηδείῳ γινομένοις ὡραίοις ἀνθεῖ, τὰ τε λήϊα τῶν ἄλλων οὐδὲν καταδεέστερον τέθηλεν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ὕδασις ἢ χώρα ἐναβρυνομένη διαρκῶς φαίνεται. πρὸς δύνοντα δὲ πᾶν τοῦναντίον, ὥστε ἀμέλει ἀνθρώπῳ μὲν οὐδὲ ἡμῶριον δυνατόν ἐστιν ἐνταῦθα βιῶναι, ἔχισ δὲ καὶ ὄφεις ἀνάριθμοι καὶ ἄλλων θηρίων παντοδαπὰ γένη διακεκλήρωται τὸν χῶρον ἐκεῖνον. καί, τὸ δὴ παραλογώτατον, οἱ ἐπιχώριοι λέγουσιν ὡς, εἴ τις ἄνθρωπος τὸ τεῖχος ἀμείψας ἐπὶ θάτερα ἴοι, εὐθυωρὸν θνήσκει, τὸ λοιμῶδες τῶν ἐκεῖνη ἀέρων ὡς ἥκιστα φέρων, τοῖς τε θηρίοις ἐνθαδε ἰοῦσιν ὁ θάνατος εὐθὺς ὑπαντιάζων ἐκδέχεται. (‘In this same island of Brittia, the men of old built a great wall, cutting in two a large part of it; for the soil and the men and everything else is not alike on either side. For on the side of the wall towards the rising sun, there is temperate air and well-ordered seasons; in winter, the cold is not too extreme and in summer it is

moderately warm, and many men dwell there, living in the same way as other men, and the trees bear good fruit at the right season, crops grow in abundance and the land is watered by many springs. Everything is the opposite of this on the side facing the setting sun, so that it is impossible for a man to live there for half an hour. The land is infested with serpents, vipers and other venomous animals, and the air is so foul that people say that if a man crosses the wall, he will die straight away.’)

It is difficult to know what to make of this, although it is clearly not sober history and resembles folklore. Prokopios was evidently very poorly informed about Britain, as there is nowhere a wall that separates part of the island with good air from a region with bad air, whether it be Hadrian’s Wall, the Antonine Wall or Offa’s Dyke. He continued with a story that he disbelieved, about the souls of the dead being taken to the other side of the wall by boat. Blake and Lloyd (2000: 141–144) suggested that this ‘Land of the Dead’ referred to concentrations of Bronze Age burial mounds on the Clwydian and Berwyn Mountains and identified it with ‘*Ynys Afallach/Avalon*’ and the Welsh underworld, *Anmwn*. Like the rest of their geographical speculation, this is fantasy: the apparent concentration of barrows in upland areas is a result of the lack of the ploughing that has destroyed them at lower altitudes, particularly in recent centuries.

Monuments in context

The two acknowledged Roman walls – those of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius – are well-known monuments that have been studied extensively and intensively for several centuries (Breeze and Dobson 2000: xiii). Consequently, they are understood in great detail, and a vast amount of archaeological evidence has been assembled not just about the walls but about their supporting infrastructure and general context. If the earthwork we know as Offa’s Dyke is in fact of early third-century date, we would expect it to exhibit many, if not all, the features of these two walls, especially the Antonine, which is an earthwork embankment. On the other hand, if Offa’s Dyke is early medieval, then it ought to display features consistent with other early medieval earthworks, such as West and East Wansdyke (Malim 2020).

The Antonine Wall consists of a turf rampart at least 3m and perhaps as much as 3.7m high; this was laid on a stone base usually 4.3m wide (Breeze and Dobson 2000: 96). In this respect, it resembled other linear frontier works (such as the German and North African *limites*). To the north of the wall, at a usual distance of 6.1m, lay a ditch 12.2m wide and 4m deep in the eastern sector and averaging 8.4m wide and as little as 1.8m deep in the western. On top of the wall stood a wooden palisade and walkway. Immediately south of the wall ran a road about 5.5m wide; this was an innovation, as Hadrian’s Wall was served by the existing Stanegate, some distance to the south. The wall was built in segments by detachments from the three legions serving in the province, who recorded their work on highly decorative distance slabs (e.g. RIB 2139,

2173, 2184, 2185, 2186, 3507 (Collingwood and Wright 1995: 657 ff; Tomlin *et al.* 2009: 450–451)). Numerous temporary camps housing the troops involved in the building work have been located. Finally, some nineteen forts were placed at intervals along the wall, at an average distance of about 3.25km (although this varies considerably). The forts themselves vary in size but contain the usual range of buildings (headquarters buildings, commandants' residences, barracks, stores, granaries, stables and so on). With one exception (Cadder), the forts faced north, towards hostile territory. Fortlets and beacon platforms have also been recognised on the wall.

What we have in the Antonine Wall is a complex and integrated system. There is a great deal of archaeological evidence for its construction in the form of temporary camps and building inscriptions, then of its garrison. We do not have to rely on the fourth-century *Historia Augusta* to tell us that it was built under Antoninus Pius, as the distance slabs record the name of the emperor.

How does Offa's Dyke compare? If, as Blake and Lloyd asserted, it was built by the emperor Septimius Severus, who was in Britain from 208 until he died in 211, it ought to show many similarities with the Antonine Wall, built almost seventy years earlier. It ought also to show some innovations based on the experience of that wall. In any case, they failed to draw any comparisons between the two monuments.

The earthwork construction of Offa's Dyke varies considerably along its length (Ray and Bapty 2016: 165 ff) and, unlike the Hadrianic and Antonine frontiers, it is not demonstrably continuous. There are many original gaps, including along a 5km stretch where the River Severn marks the boundary. Fox's idea that there was one of 96km where the River Wye formed the frontier was shown to be wrong by Noble (1983: 10 ff). Although Hill and Worthington (2003 *passim*) challenged this, Ray and Bapty (2016: 50–54) follow Noble in seeing the banks in this area as part of Offa's scheme. In its monumental form, the earthwork stands at least 7.3m high. At Llanfynydd, at the northernmost end of Offa's Dyke, the ditch was found to be at least 4m wide and 1.5m deep; there was no gap between it and the base of the bank. Hill and Worthington (2003: 101) concluded that the ditch was 7m wide and 2m deep, 'with few exceptions'. In places, the combined width of the bank and ditch is 20m. There is no evidence for a continuous palisade on top the Dyke. Although there seems to have been a stone wall in places and timber fencing in others, while some sections of Wat's Dyke appear to have had a timber frontage to the rampart (as at Sychdyn, near Mold (Hill 1991: 145)), these were in place to minimise the risk of the bank slipping into the ditch. Both Dykes lack the infrastructure seen at the Antonine Wall: there is no military road, no garrison stationed in forts attached to the Dyke, no temporary camps to house the builders (Hill and Worthington 2003: 123), no building inscriptions. Although New Radnor, Old Mills Moat, Buttington and Nanteribba Gaer have occasionally been claimed as Offan forts, this is unlikely (Musson and Spurgeon 1988: 108; Ray and Bapty 2016: 247). Moreover, the Antonine Wall is full of Roman artefacts recovered during excavations: Offa's Dyke

has only scraps of abraded Roman material culture within its structure. Blake and Lloyd (2000: 65) wrote about the ‘Roman artefacts... found within the Dyke’ as if they date its construction. The concept of the *terminus post quem* ought to tell us that the Dyke is of Roman or later date. This principle states that any archaeological deposit must be as old as, or older than, the youngest object it contains. The inclusion of Roman finds within Offa’s Dyke is entirely possible – indeed, perhaps even to be expected – because of residuality, the tendency for old objects to occur in deposits of much more recent date.

The most devastating argument against regarding Offa’s Dyke as a Roman defensive work is that of context (Figure 2). What possible function could it have performed? To the east of the Dyke, the Midlands of England were part of a prosperous civil province of the Roman Empire, although at its northern end lay an area in Cheshire dominated by the military. To its west lay further areas under civilian rule (notably in the south) as well as areas under military control (predominantly in mid and north Wales); it was every bit as much part of the province as the area to the east. Linear defensive works elsewhere in the Empire marked the boundary between civilised, Roman life and *barbaricum*, the uncivilised world outside, which might, at best, be home to a few outpost forts. Third-century Wales can in no way be thought of as anything other than part of *Britannia*.

The Dyke is wholly unrelated to the pattern of early third-century military sites in the region. Forts and fortresses close to it include Chester in the north (undergoing considerable refurbishment early in the third century) and Caerleon in the south as well as auxiliary forts, such as those at Castell Collen, Caersŵs and Forden Gaer. The road system shows no sign of being aware of the Dyke. Moreover, the only dating evidence from stratigraphy proves it to be later than Roman occupation at Ffrith; how much later cannot be determined on archaeological grounds alone.

There is, moreover, an early medieval context for the Dyke. Apart from Wat’s Dyke, which marks a slightly different boundary in the north and continues to the Dee Estuary, there are numerous post-Roman earthworks across Britain (Grigg 2018: 38–42). The majority of them are to be found in eastern England, and most are short structures lying across significant routes. One possibly relevant earthwork, though, is the Wansdyke, an earthwork boundary south of the Thames, defending the area to its south. The traditional view is that Wansdyke seems to have been built in the fifth or sixth century to protect the British kingdoms of the southwest against attack from the Thames Valley, where Saxon kingdoms had been established (Worthington 1999: 467). A later, seventh- to eighth-century date has also been proposed (Reynolds and Langlands 2006: 35–36; Eagles and Allen 2018: 99).

Unlike the Roman linear frontiers, these dykes were not provided with garrisons, but often appear to be more like boundaries imposed by a militarily dominant power. They were not located to defend the areas behind them but to act as lines of demarcation, unlike most early medieval dykes, which were short and designed to make raiding

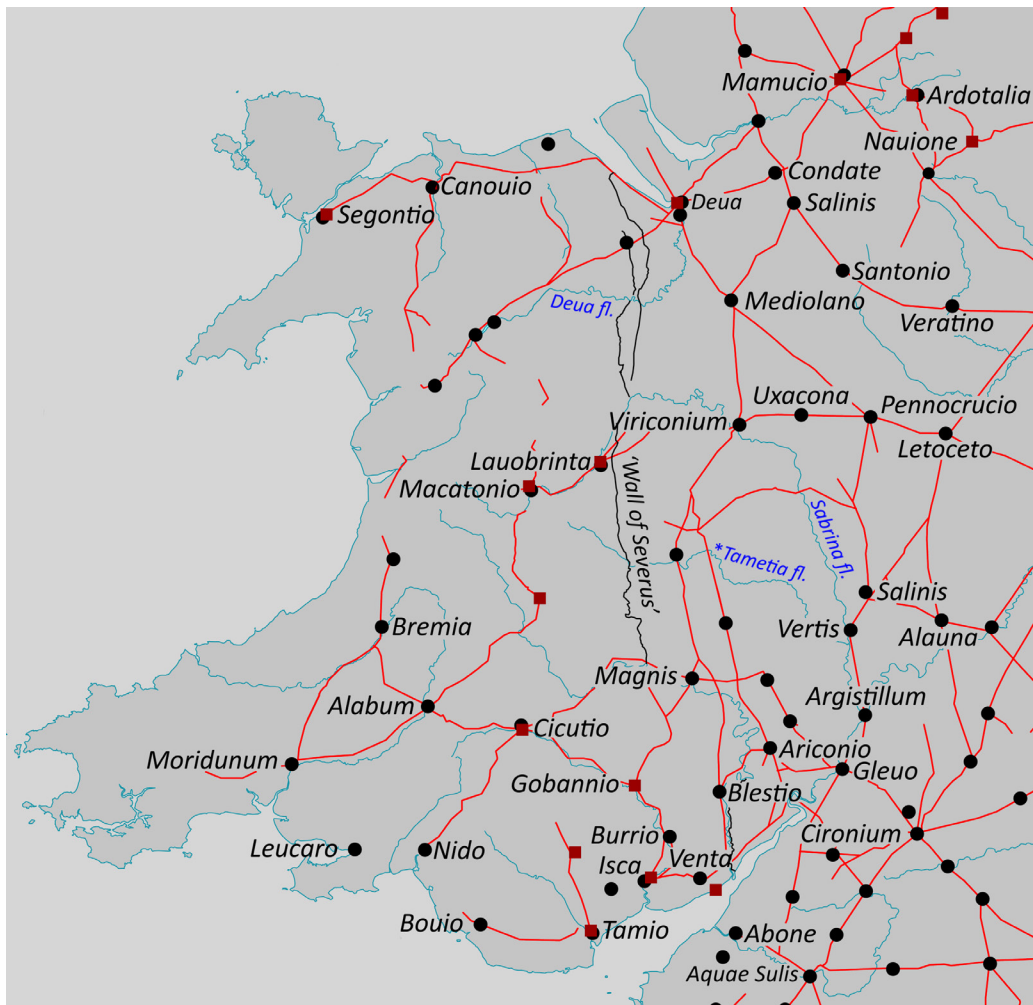


Figure 2: Offa's Dyke superimposed on a third-century Roman context

more difficult (Grigg 2018: 137). The tradition of earthwork barriers was a long one in Anglo-Saxon England, and it provides a useful context for location the construction of Offa's Dyke in the late eighth century as one of the last and undoubtedly the greatest of these structures (Hill and Worthington 2003: 100). Thousands of men were needed to build the Dyke (Ray and Bapty 2016: 215), proof that the kingdom of Mercia was highly organised and under robust central control. The ninth-century history of Mercia, with the destruction of its bureaucracy and ecclesiastical structure by Viking armies, means that its place in the history of Britain has often been undervalued. To regard its people as barbarians incapable of such works (as did Blake and Lloyd) not only ignores their long tradition of dyke building but also shows a woeful ignorance of the political sophistication of Mercia (Halsall 2013: 301). Offa regarded Charlemagne as an equal (even if Charlemagne did not reciprocate the compliment); this was more than self-flattery.

A prehistoric Offa's Dyke?

Ancient hydraulic engineering

Many pseudoarchaeological claims are so outrageous that they can appear to be jokes or even taunts aimed at established scholars. That, unfortunately, is not the case with the proposal that Offa's Dyke is a prehistoric canal (Langdon 2014). The evidence marshalled for the hypothesis is remarkably thin: the use of the word *dyke* to mean an earthwork that is not a watercourse (Langdon 2014: 97), Eutropius's *Breuiarium* (already discussed) and the statement that 'archaeologists are now finding Neolithic flints inside the ditch of the dyke' (Langdon 2014: 120). Supposedly, both Offa's Dyke and Wansdyke 'were constructed in a time when superficial deposits were formed by the flooding after the last ice age... all these 'dykes' actually link high groundwater levels together', creating a 'canal between two water courses' (Langdon 2014: 325).

The argument proceeds mainly by assertion and a misunderstanding of how prehistoric lithics can make their way into a ditch in the landscape. There is no discussion of countervailing data, just criticism of '[t]raditional archaeologists' who apparently 'maintain that these ditches were built, not for water but or [sic] some kind of 'ceremonial' purpose' (Langdon 2014: loc. 324). These unnamed 'traditional archaeologists' are a straw man whose works the present author has never encountered in the archaeological literature about earthwork dykes. As a pseudoarchaeological argument, it is typical, though: present something so outrageously outlandish that no one could believe it as a way to undermine the credibility of those '[t]raditional archaeologists' who are said without evidence to use it.

(Ley) Lines on the land

It was inevitable that an earthwork that traverses the landscape in lines that are frequently straight should be co-opted into the system of ley lines. Although usually said to have first been identified by Alfred Watkins in the 1920s (Watkins 1922), he can only be credited with their name. Instead, the idea of straight lines in the landscape originating as prehistoric trackways can be laid at the door of Joseph Houghton Spencer. His overlooked paper 'Ancient trackways in England' proposed that 'a central line of long distance signals, with more frequent posts to the right and left connecting the natural harbours at the mouths of the Wey, Axe, Otter, Exe, Teign, Parret, Brue, Avon, Medway, Thames, and Humber' existed across England (Spencer 1889: 98). However, Spencer recognised that the 'direct signal-line stations, though no doubt connected with each other by trackways, would not always afford the best lines for the principal roadways', a constraining factor that did not trouble Watkins.

It is unlikely that Watkins drew inspiration from Spencer's paper: he does not mention it in any of his published works. The Woolhope Club, the antiquarian and natural history society of which he was a prominent member, did not subscribe to *The Antiquary*, so he will not have seen the paper in the club's library. Although the two ideas are so close in

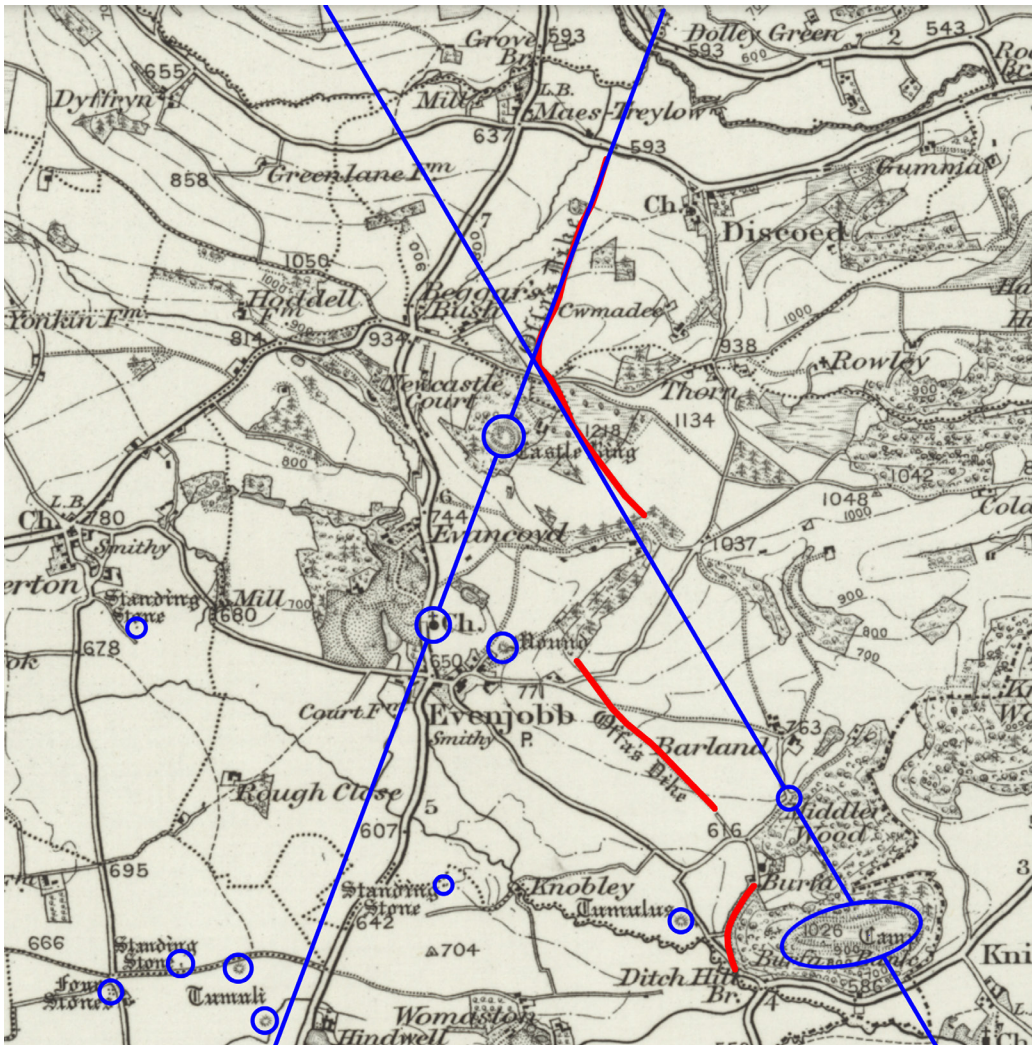


Figure 3: Offa's Dyke 'following' two ley lines; Offa's Dyke is shown in red; blue rings highlight sites considered marker points for leys (after Watkins 1925, fig. 21, redrawn on the Ordnance Survey One Inch Map 1885–1900)

conception, there is little cause to accuse Alfred Watkins of plagiarism: his 'old straight track' crossed hills, valleys and rivers without regard to topography. Watkins (1925: 20) identified two stretches of Offa's Dyke in the Vale of Radnor as parts of leys (Figure 3); it is notable how few of the supposed 'marker points' are incorporated into the lines and how poorly Offa's Dyke follows them. At Mellington Park, he considered the outwork (Fox 1995: 103) standing higher than the Dyke to be 'a sighting mound on an earlier track, which the dyke here follows'. Further south, by Tack Wood in the Clun Forest (Fox 1955: 130), the Dyke turns through a 'right angle' (at 'Hergan Corner'). According to Watkins (1925: 21), this incorporates 'two leys crossing at a sighting mound, and the dyke appropriating in its winding course fragments of both leys and tracks, and therefore turning on the mound'.

A great deal of Late Victorian and early twentieth-century antiquarian speculation encompassed the identification of ancient trackways. They could be of any age – prehistoric, Roman or medieval – and were more often than not indeterminately ‘ancient’; they could also be of any character, including military ways, saltways, trade routes and so on. The speculations of Watkins and, before him, Spencer, while wrong and unscientific (Williamson and Bellamy 1983), were simply an extension of this approach to ancient routes. A cautious approach to the study of pre-modern tracks has never really been at the forefront of archaeological research: some of the worst ‘research’ has been carried out on Roman roads. An excellent example of this approach, the dense network of Roman roads in the south-east Midlands identified by a group calling itself *The Viatores* (1964), while well-intentioned, was a triumph of enthusiasm over rigour (Simco 1984: 78–79).

(Un)scientific dating

The so-called ‘Radiocarbon Revolution’ (Renfrew 1973) offered archaeologists working without an historically anchored chronology the chance to assign approximate dates to prehistoric sites. As the accuracy of dating techniques has improved, so its use in historical archaeology has become more viable. It has been long considered best practice to quote the laboratory code, the Conventional Radiocarbon Age (or CRA) in years BP with its standard deviation and the curve used in any calibration (Millard 2014: 556–557). It should also be borne in mind that a radiocarbon age, even after calibration, is not a ‘date’ but a statistical approximation to the age of a sample. The reliability of a determined age is dependent on the number of atoms of radioactive C^{14} calculated against the number of atoms of stable C^{12} . This is based on the weight of the sample to be tested and either the evidence of radioactive decay (measured by an instrument such as a Geiger counter, known as beta counting) or by spectroscopic analysis of charged carbon ions in a particle accelerator (known as Accelerator Mass Spectrometry or AMS dating).

Whichever technique is used – and AMS dating is the preferred technique because its accuracy is greater – the results assess the age of the sample based on how far its proportion of C^{14} has declined from the assumed starting point of 1 in 670,000,000,000 atoms. In older samples, there are fewer C^{14} atoms to start with, so there is an age limit beyond which assessment becomes impractical; fortunately, for monuments such as Offa’s Dyke, they are well within the range of countability. The length of time available for beta counting will also affect the accuracy of the results. An assessment of the reliability is given as a margin of error accompanying the age Before Present, expressed as a standard deviation. One standard deviation either side of the determined age, which is a sampling mean, gives a 68% probability that the real age falls within that range; two standard deviations provide a 95% probability; three give a 99.7% probability. For most uses, an age expressed as a range within two standard deviations is likely to be correct most of the time.

There are further complications. The CRA uses the determination of the half-life of C^{14} made by Willard Libby in the late 1940s (Millard 2014: 555). At 5568 years, it is about 3% lower than the currently accepted standard of 5730 years; however, it is a convention that the CRA is given using the Libby half-life, allowing comparisons to be made between all the radiocarbon determinations carried out since the technique was first developed. A more serious cause for confusion is that Libby's assumption that the proportion of radioactive C^{14} in the environment has remained constant; by the 1960s, it was realised that this is not the case. The ratio of C^{14} to C^{12} has varied considerably over time, for a variety of reasons. Factors include the strength of the cosmic rays bombarding the atmosphere that create C^{14} in the first place. Once this was recognised as an issue with understanding the age of dated materials, a technique was developed to calibrate the determination against changes in the proportion of the two isotopes (Renfrew 1973: 77–85). Calibration curves are based principally on wood samples dated by dendrochronology; in this way, a consistent pattern has emerged, showing periods when there has been more C^{14} in the atmosphere and periods when there is less. The assessment of radiocarbon ages from these independently dated samples is also subject to a margin of error, so the margin of error for calibrated dates is necessarily wider than for the original determination. Several different calibrations curves have been produced over the years, including some for specific materials and specific parts of the world, so it is always necessary to indicate which curve has been used (Millard 2014: 557).

The next issue is to understand the nature of the sample being dated (Aitken 1990: 87–92). The radiocarbon determination gives the date at which the organism from which the carbon derived ceased to absorb more atmospheric carbon. If it is part of a timber, it will date the year in which a specific growth ring ceased to form; if a grain, it will indicate the year of the growing season for that crop; if an animal, it will date its death. Problems can occur where radiocarbon determinations are made on timber, as there is a tendency for structural timbers to be reused, while those in a hearth can also have seen prior use.

Finally, the truism that 'a single date is no date' must be recognised: the potential for the reuse of old materials, sample contamination, laboratory error, and so on is not negligible. For this reason, a single date is next to useless. It is good practice to date several samples, preferably from different parts of a well-stratified sequence or different materials within a single phase in the stratigraphic sequence. The application of Bayesian statistics allows a sequence of dates to be modelled using knowledge of prior probabilities so that a determination made on a sample stratigraphically earlier than another can be tweaked. This technique was used on the Optically Stimulated Luminescence dates obtained from soil samples at Gobowen (Malim and Hayes 2008: 174).

Much of the preceding discussion may appear to be teaching a grandmother to suck eggs (from an archaeologist's perspective), but it is necessary to reiterate in this context. This is because archaeologists still sometimes throw around radiocarbon determinations without giving much thought to the processes involved in their acquisition. This in turn is circulated in the media and popular syntheses, with calibrated date ranges quoted

(or, worse, single years), which are then taken up by the public as if they represent historical dates: they do not. There are statistical approximations of age and should never be treated otherwise. When misused by pseudoarchaeologists, they implicitly carry an authority they cannot bear. With this in mind, let us reflect again on the current state-of-play regarding Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke.

Offa's Dyke: Chirk

Excavation of a section of Offa's Dyke at Chirk damaged by unauthorised landscaping yielded four samples from deposits at the base of the bank that were submitted for radiocarbon dating (Grant 2014a: 15). The dates have been quoted widely in the media, always in the form 'between 430 and 652', without quoting the uncalibrated determination. These have not previously been made available but are in the final grey literature report on the excavation (Grant 2014b), which has hitherto been embargoed from public consultation. According to Belford (2017: 69), this means that 'the bank was built after AD 430 at the very earliest', although this would be better expressed as a 95% probability that the Dyke post-dates AD 430, which does not entirely rule out an earlier date.

Four samples were submitted for radiocarbon analysis: three samples of hazel 'charcoal' and one of alder 'charcoal' (Grant 2014a: 16). They derived from contexts (08), a basal deposit within the bank (SUERC-51224), (17), a bank deposit (SUERC-51225), (16), another bank deposit (SUERC-51226), and (15), the alder from a bank deposit stratified above (16) and (17) (SUERC-51230). All therefore represent material incorporated during the construction of the bank whose primary source is unknown. Although it may well have been vegetation cleared to permit construction of the Dyke, it is also possible that it derived from pre-dyke occupation or clearance.

Three of the dates (SUERC-51225, SUERC 51226 and SUERC-51230) give consistent ages of 1466 ± 35 BP, 1474 ± 35 BP and 1499 ± 35 BP. These were calibrated by the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit program OxCal4 to cal. AD 541–651, 475–458 and cal. AD 536–652, and 430–493 and cal. AD 530–653 at 2σ . These calibrations give a 95% probability that the 'charcoal' (more likely carbonised wood not deliberately manufactured as charcoal) originated in plants growing between the mid-fifth to mid-seventh centuries, probably later in that range. The outlier, SUERC-51224, gave a radiocarbon age of 1092 ± 35 BP, calibrated to cal. AD 887–1019.

The interpretation of these dates is not quite as simple as the stories promoted by the media would suggest. The three mid-fifth to mid-seventh century samples do not date the bank directly: they indicate the age of burnt wood samples incorporated into it. They demonstrate that the construction of this section of Offa's Dyke is post-Roman, allowing us to rule out an attribution to Septimius Severus. That they are all of consistent date is significant and might be used to support a sixth- to seventh-century date for the construction of this section. Such dating would be a legitimate interpretation, with one *caveat*: we do not know the age of the wood when it was incorporated into the Dyke.

It is possible that the material derives from an earlier collection of burnt wood (such as a hearth) pre-dating the construction of the Dyke. However, the close correlation between the dates makes this argument a case of special pleading.

The fourth date is puzzling, though. From a secure basal context, its late ninth- to early eleventh-century date makes little sense in terms of what we believe about Offa's Dyke. It is worth noting that a calibration at 3σ level (cal. AD 774–1030, calculated with CALIB 7.1 (Stuiver *et al.* 2020)) begins within the reign of Offa. Again, this is special pleading. Nevertheless, as a single date, it cannot be used to sustain a post-Offa dating for the monument, unless this section was rebuilt during the period of the Viking wars, an arguably unlikely scenario.

Wat's Dyke: Maes-y-Clawdd

Both Nurse (1999) and Blake and Lloyd (2000: 302) interpreted a date of 1571 ± 69 BP (sample UN-4158), cal. AD 483 ± 68 (CalPal Online), from a hearth beneath Wat's Dyke at Maes-y-Clawdd as indicating a precise construction date for the Dyke, '[d]ating analysis at Queen's University, Belfast, of charcoal and burnt clay samples centres puts the dyke's construction at around AD 446'. This single date was taken from Hannaford's (1998: 12–14) publication of the entire dating certificate supplied by Queen's University Belfast; a more careful reading would have shown that the certificate gives a calibrated date at 2σ of cal. AD 268–274 and 340–630.

There are two obvious problems here: it is a single date, and it derives from a feature pre-dating the construction of Wat's Dyke. In archaeological terms, it is a *terminus post quem*, informing us that there is a 95% likelihood that this section of the Dyke was built after AD 268. There is also a 95% chance that the wood consumed by the fire in the hearth was alive between the third and seventh centuries AD. Dates from carbonised wood have long been recognised as among the least informative for establishing chronology (Aitken 1990: 90 f.). The radiocarbon date is irrelevant to the construction and date of Wat's Dyke and merely tells us that a fire that burned before the bank was constructed used fuel that is 95% likely to have been growing between AD 268 and 630.

Less critical writers have taken Nurse's (1999) popular reporting of the date as 'around AD 446' and built elaborate hypotheses around it. In Professor Jim Storr's (2016: 178) view, 'Cunedda may have built Wat's Dyke. Cunedda gave his name to Gwynedd'. Storr's assertions are 'not even wrong', to use a phrase attributed to Wolfgang Pauli: Cunedda is a legendary figure whose association with Gwynedd has been challenged (Koch 2013: 64 ff) and whose Brittonic name *Cunodagos* does not underlie Gwynedd (Brittonic *Ueneda*). He is inconsistent, though, as he subsequently informs us that 'seems to have responded' to a threat from Gwynedd following the conquest of Cheshire 'by digging a major earthwork, now known as Wat's Dyke' (Storr 2016: 193). Storr, whose historical framework appears to have been taken wholesale from John Morris's (1973) much criticised *The Age of Arthur* (Storr 2016: 267), is keen to date all earthwork dykes to the early medieval period. He excoriates

archaeologists who believe some of them to have been built in prehistory while dismissing evidence that they were (Storr 2016: 266; Grigg 2018: 36–37).

Wat's Dyke: Gobowen

The use of Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating on a section of Wat's Dyke investigated at Gobowen (Shropshire) in 2006 has brought a new technique to bear on the problem. Two dates, in particular, have been key in suggesting a date for the Dyke. They are X2839, from the soil beneath the bank, which was dated 1110 ± 130 years before testing in 2007, and X2833, from a ditch silt at a depth of 2.1m, of 1110 ± 105 (Malim and Hayes 2008: 165). The excavator quotes these as giving historical dates of AD 767–1027 and AD 792–1002 respectively, prompting him to suggest an early ninth-century construction, perhaps as the work of Cenwulf (King of Mercia 796–821).

OSL is a relatively new technique, which counts electrons trapped within the crystalline matrix of certain minerals, especially quartz (Jacobs and Roberts 2007: 211). The energy of sunlight is sufficient to release trapped electrons so that the quartz crystals within a soil exposed to it will lose them. Once the deposit is buried, they begin to accumulate again. Unlike radiocarbon, which relies on organic materials incorporated into the soil, OSL dates are useful for dating the formation of an archaeological deposit, with certain caveats. Soil that remains exposed to light or that is re-exposed (for instance, during ditch cleaning) will yield a date that indicates the time of its burial, not formation. It is a handy technique for dating topsoil buried beneath an earthwork bank.

Because OSL dating's margins of error are based on standard deviations from a mean, like radiocarbon dates, determination X2839 (1110 ± 130 years before 2007) has a 68% chance of falling between AD 767 and 1027; this increases to 95% if we take the range as AD 637 to 1157. Similarly, determination X2833 (1110 ± 105 before 2007) has a 68% chance of falling between AD 792 and 1002, increasing to 95% in the range AD 687 to 1107. Dating construction to the reign of Cenwulf thus falls within the 68% probability range; so does a date late in the reign of Offa. Furthermore, X2833 was derived from a secondary ditch fill (the excavator's Phase 6.2) and the Bayesian analysis of the series of dates from the ditch published as figure 26 (Malim and Hayes 2008: 174) pushes the mean back to about 780. The analysis means that there is a greater than 50% chance that this deposit was buried before the end of Offa's reign, a very different conclusion from that promoted in the report and subsequently in the media.

Analysis of the dating

Scientific dating of archaeological materials, be they organic remains or buried soils, brings with it the cachet of rigorous technical expertise. Samples are treated in laboratories, subjected to precise measurement and a certificate issued to the commissioning archaeologist. To that extent, they avoid entanglement in the theoretical preconceptions of the excavator. However, too few archaeologists and even fewer

non-archaeologists understand that scientific dates are not like historical dates: they are statistical statements involving distribution about a mean. Always supplied with a standard deviation or 'margin of error', this 'margin' should not be read as covering the range of possible historical dates. One standard deviation either side of the mean encompasses only a 68% probability.

This constraint is too often overlooked. Press releases from those who commissioned the laboratory work are generally framed around a date range suggested by the scientific date without explaining potential pitfalls. At worst, uncritical writers and the media quote the mean as if it is an approximation to an historical date and use it to construct elaborate hypotheses.

None of the scientific dates for the dykes of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands is robust enough to necessitate 'rewriting history', despite the hyperbole of headline writers. Indeed, the available dates can be used to support the consensus views that Wat's Dyke is probably late seventh or early eighth-century in origin and that Offa of Mercia was responsible for the Dyke that bears his name. They could also be used as ammunition to undertake a redating of the monuments, but they would require further evidence to do so.

Conclusions

Archaeology has not settled the dating of the dykes to a precision that satisfies historians or the general public. Although it has revealed details of their construction and their broad relative dates, new evidence continues to fuel speculation, some of it unwarranted and much of it inconclusive. The pitfalls of scientific dating are rarely expressed in these claims, which are often trumpeted loudly in press releases, hardly an ideal medium for expressing the caution they require. Bold statements are generally the most effective means of gaining the attention of the media and, increasingly, are expressed in terms of 'rewriting history'. The discoveries rarely match the hyperbole and, all too often, the damage has been done: dubious assertions have been spread widely and entered the public understanding of the past. The overall effect is to create doubt about the accuracy of previously accepted narratives, even if the details of the new claims are not remembered.

Keith Nurse's (1999) redating of Wat's Dyke attracted a flurry of interest in the wake of his publication, and its long-term effect has mainly been in the public realm. Historic Environment Records have adopted it, as have those responsible for interpretive signage. The impact of the more recently publicised conflicting dates suggested by radiocarbon determinations and optically stimulated luminescence has yet to be seen. The suggestion that Offa's Dyke may have incorporated existing earthworks was more widely disseminated in the national press (and even picked up by some European sources). The implication that some of these might have been as early as the fifth to seventh centuries led to press comments that the monument would have to be renamed. The suggestion that it was not an entirely new construction of Offa is not original (Feryok 2001: 184; Belford 2017: 65) but the case for unitary construction remains strong

(Ray and Bapty 2016: 334 ff). The likelihood of a single period of building makes the ninth- to eleventh-century date from Chirk all the more curious and likely to be an error.

Pseudoarchaeology tends to start with an explanation and then casts about for evidence. Blake and Lloyd (2000: 302) had already hypothesised that Offa's Dyke was the construction attributed to Septimius Severus by Late Antique writers and the radiocarbon date from Maes-y-Clawdd was included only '[a]s this book was nearing completion'. To them, it was confirmation that 'this evidence... establishes beyond doubt that the location of the Otherworld was to the west of the wall – and so Avalon and the Land of the dead return home'.

Blake and Lloyd's work had a limited impact (although, at the time of writing, Wikipedia cites it as an authority for Wat's Dyke).¹ By the time they published their second book, *Pendragon*, they had drawn back from their identification of Offa's Dyke as the 'Wall of Severus'. Here, they refer to their earlier hypothesis as '*an alternative view*' (Blake and Lloyd 2002: 281) and the fifth-century date for Wat's Dyke has vanished completely. Wikipedia maintains a page for the 'Wall of Severus',² without reaching any firm conclusions. Along the way, it wrongly cites the present author as claiming that '[a]rchaeological evidence has been discovered showing parts of Offa's Dyke, on the England-Wales border, is at least as old as the mid-5th century'.

The dykes of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands are famous and conspicuous monuments whose extent and function are still areas of lively debate (Tyler 2011: 151). However, they have suffered from a lack of interest outside a small group of dedicated specialists (Fox 1955; Noble 1983; Hill and Worthington 2003; Ray and Bapty 2016) whose work remains largely unknown by the general public. A recent major assessment of the archaeology of early medieval Britain mentions Offa's Dyke only in passing (Carver 2019: 551), and this is not an isolated case; it would be unthinkable for accounts of Roman Britain to gloss over the construction of Hadrian's Wall in this way. Grigg's (2018) reassessment of early medieval dykes as a whole marks the first step towards a fuller appreciation of their date, form and function, but much more remains to be done. Thankfully, the pseudoarchaeological community has not so far widely adopted them as monuments to be misrepresented. Nevertheless, archaeologists and historians must work to promote reliable and accurate information about these monuments, including expressions of caution and uncertainty, in the face of potential fringe and extremist narratives about them.

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My first thanks must go to Howard Williams for inviting me to revisit a piece of work that is two decades old, which was incorporated into my Bad Archaeology website (<http://www.badarchaeology.com>). After such a lengthy period, my thoughts have moved on, new data have become available, and I am grateful for the opportunity to integrate new discoveries into a revised text. I am also grateful to Gary Duckers of the

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

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

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

Introduction

The public imagination may more readily be captured by the likes of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke thanks to their sheer scale or visual impact, but archaeologists must be cautious not to overlook the many other, lesser known linear earthworks of putative early medieval origin scattered around the landscapes of Britain. In western Kent, very close to the contemporary border with Greater London, stands the Faesten Dic (Figure 1), a roughly 1.67km-long west-facing earthwork stretching in a roughly north-to-south alignment across high ground on the eastern side of the Cray Valley (Figure 2).¹ Bisected by a steep-sided valley cutting through it in a roughly north-west/south-east direction, the dyke is preserved comparatively well in large part because it is now situated within Joyden's Wood, an area that has been owned by the Woodland Trust since 1987.² Despite its proximity to the nation's capital, the Faesten Dic has attracted scant attention from those writing on the presentation of early medieval heritage, the only prior comments on the topic appearing in a blog post by Robert Briggs (2013). The comparatively little attention that the Faesten Dic has received has instead, quite understandably, focused on the date and reasons for its construction.

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

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



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

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

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

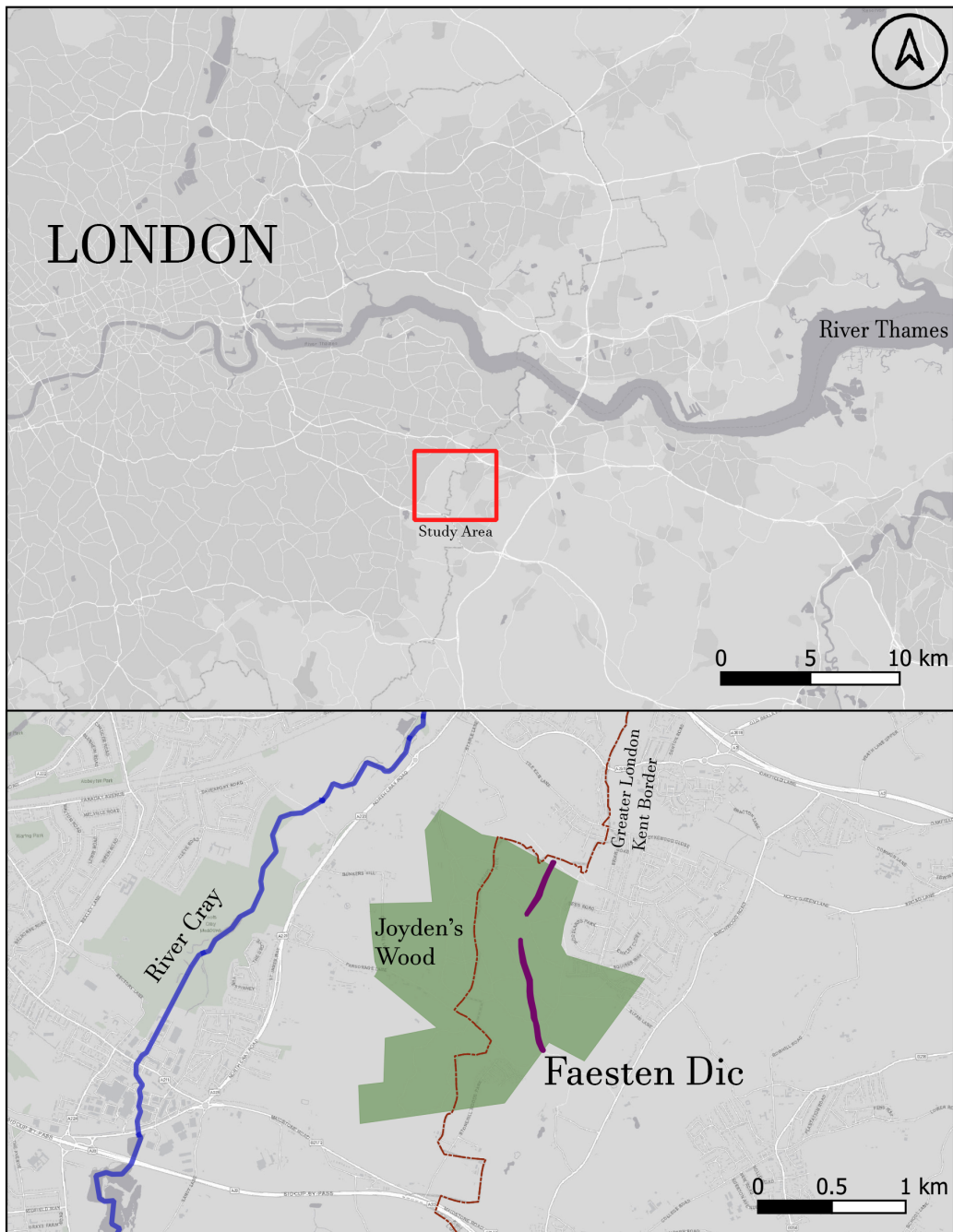


Figure 2: A map of the Faesten Dic in Joyden's Wood and the surrounding area. Created by Liam Delaney

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

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

The archaeology and history of the Faesten Dic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Encountering the Faesten Dic

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

Romans versus Saxons: an enduring narrative

The depiction of a conflict between incoming Anglo-Saxons and established Romano-Britons in south-east England stems largely from ideas with a long pedigree that remained pervasive throughout much of the mid-twentieth century. The account of a fifth-century invasion spearheaded by continental warriors such as Hengest and Horsa, as was promulgated in eighth and ninth-century sources such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the*

English People and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, have loomed large over later interpretations. Over the course of the twentieth century, archaeologists such as E.T. Leeds and J.N.L. Myres published influential books in which they drew on archaeological evidence to support this traditional account, one which was further promoted in fictionalised narratives such as Alfred Duggan's 1951 novel *Conscience of the King*.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public interactions with the Faesten Dic

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

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

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

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

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

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

Going Forward

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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

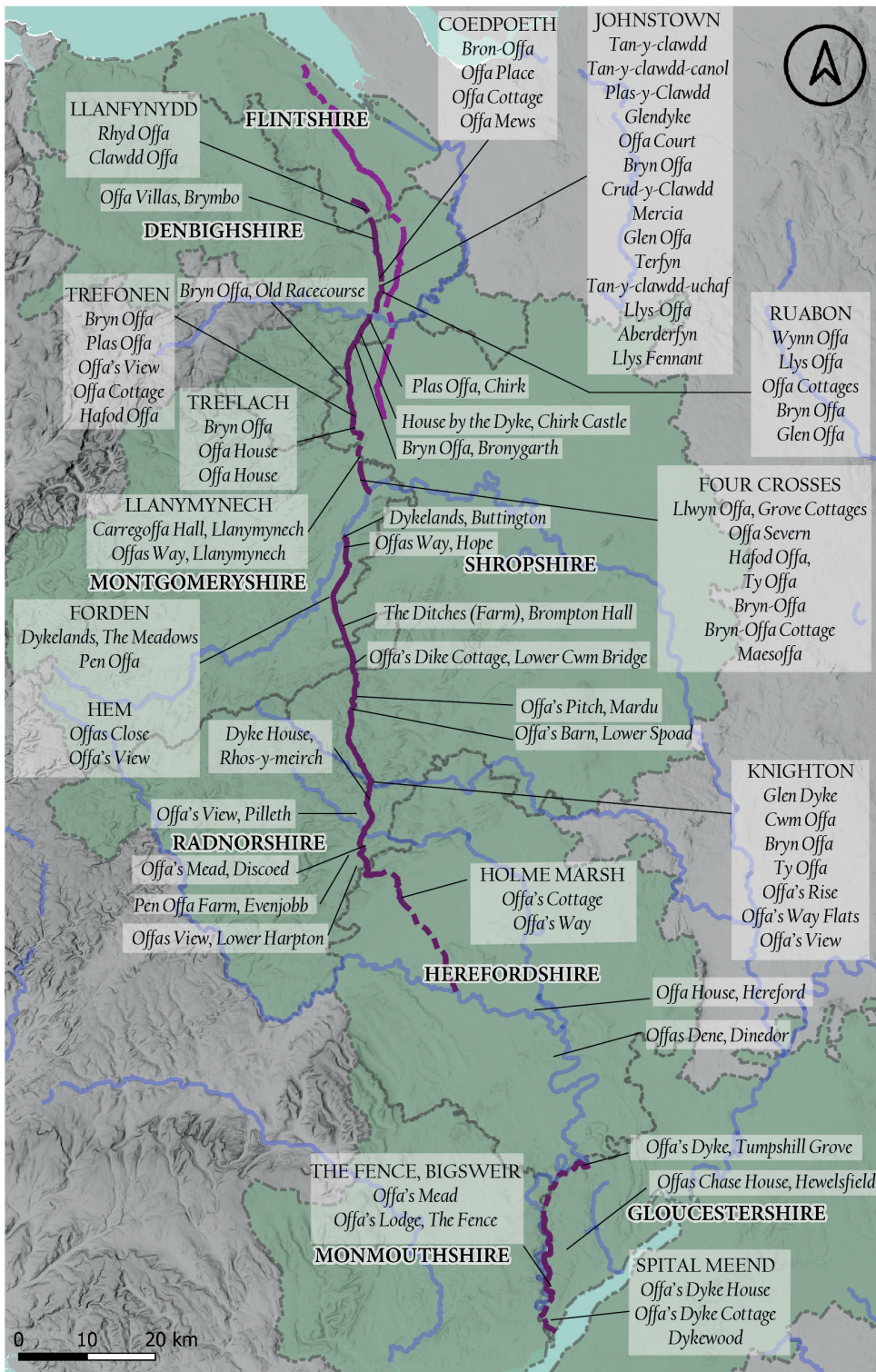


Figure 1: House-names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

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.¹

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.² 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

¹ 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,³ 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

³ <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

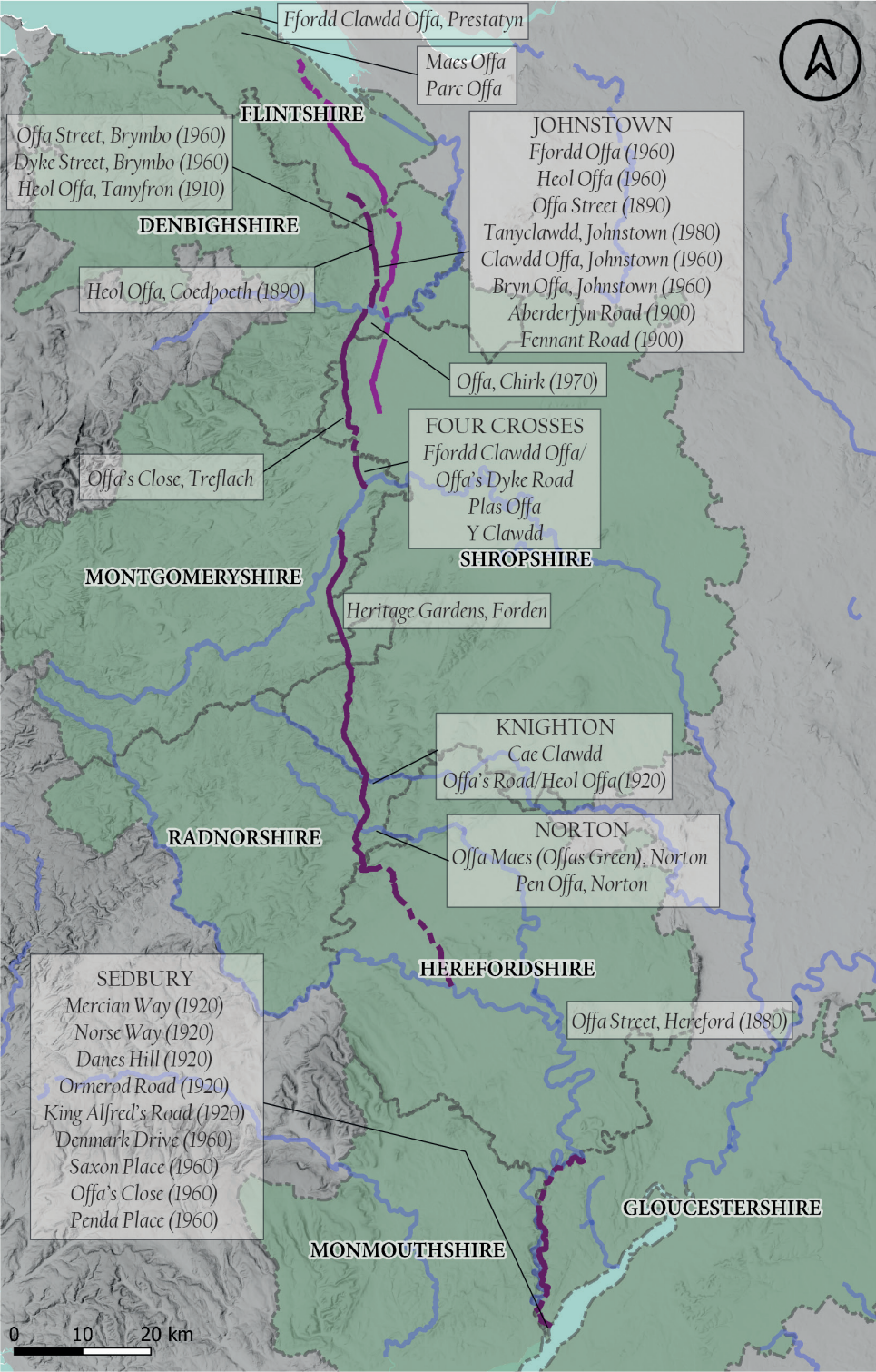


Figure 2: Street names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

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, Flint.), 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).⁴

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,

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

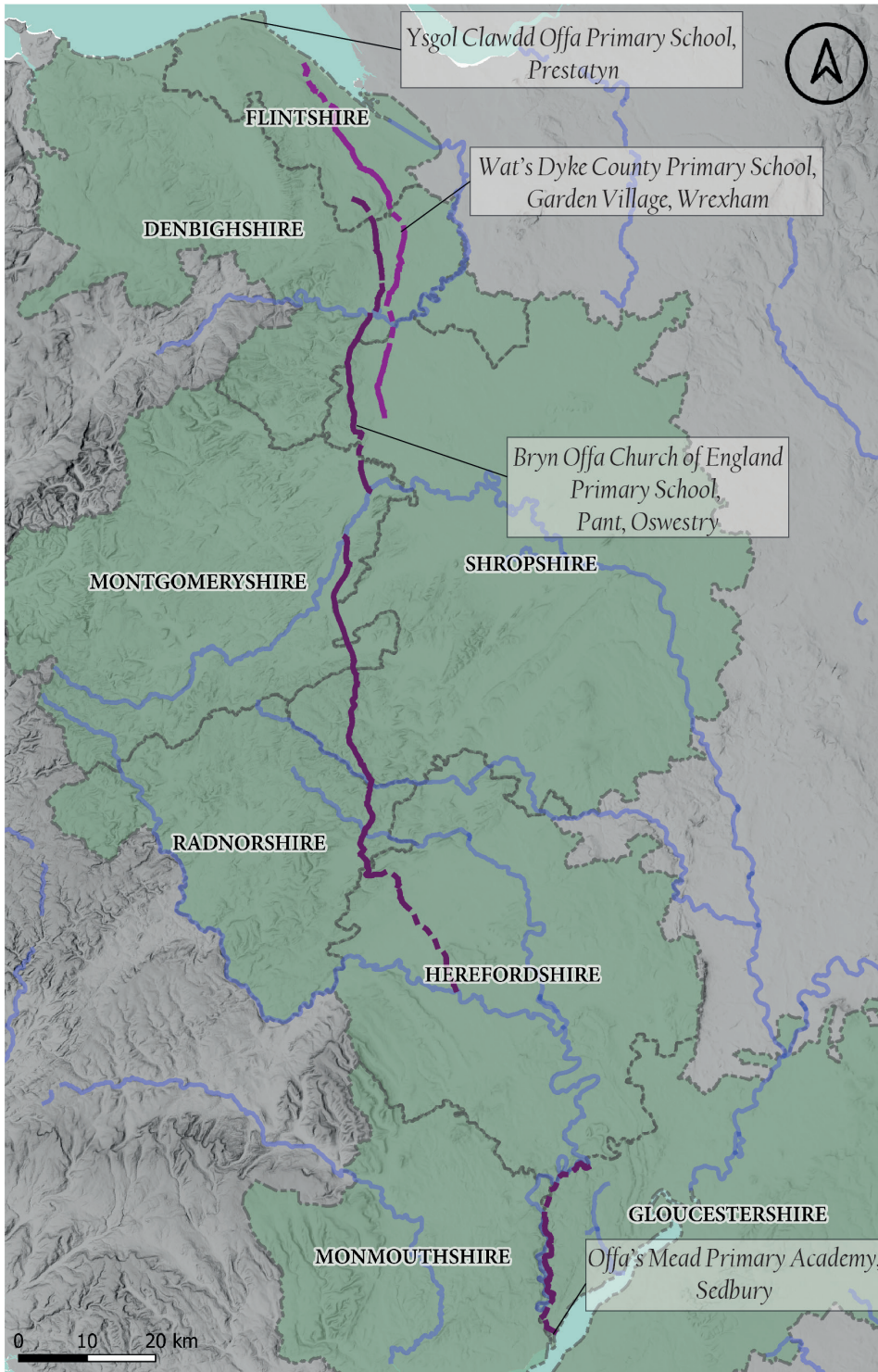


Figure 8: Schools citing Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

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.

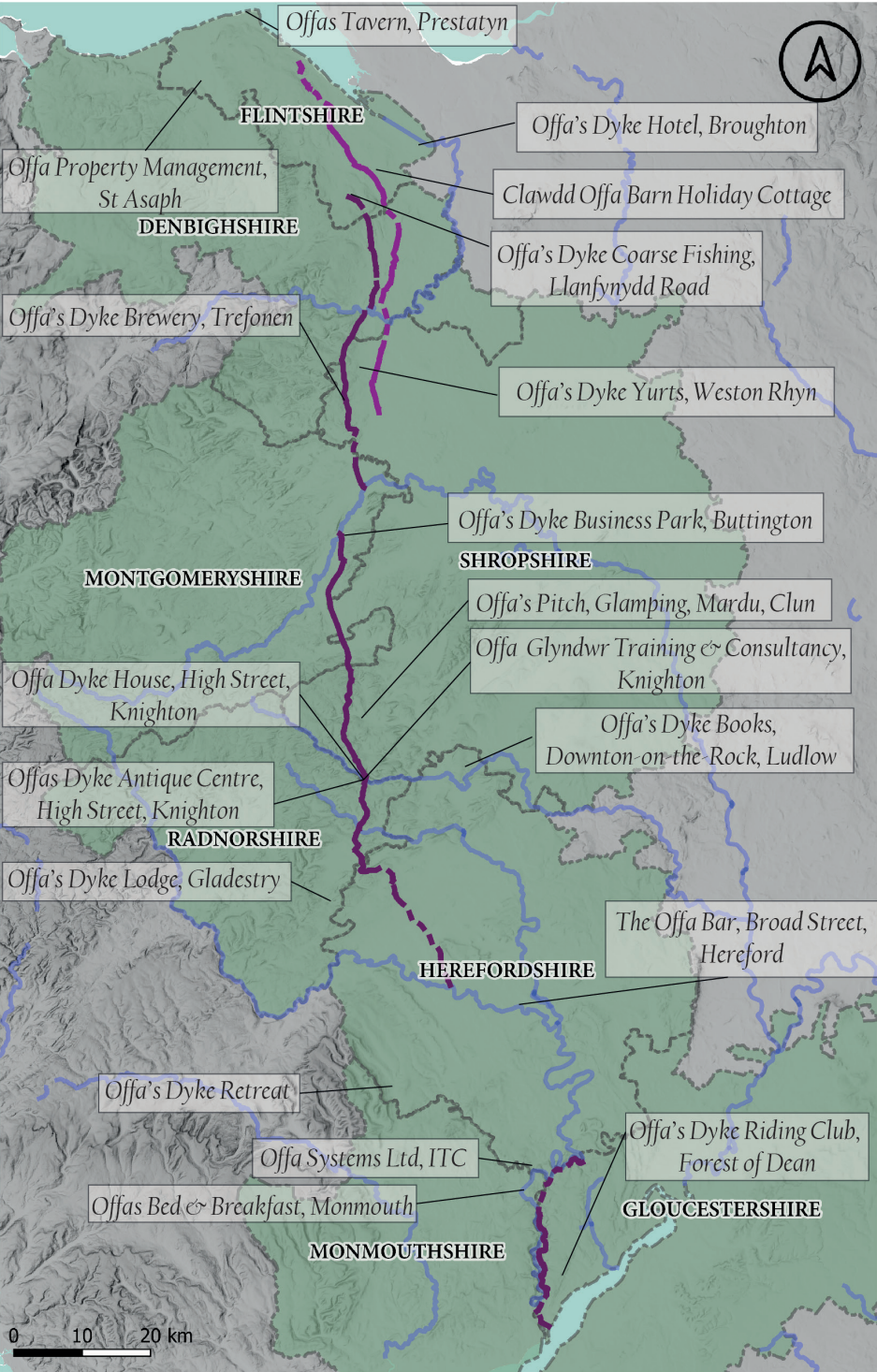


Figure 9: Businesses citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)



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).

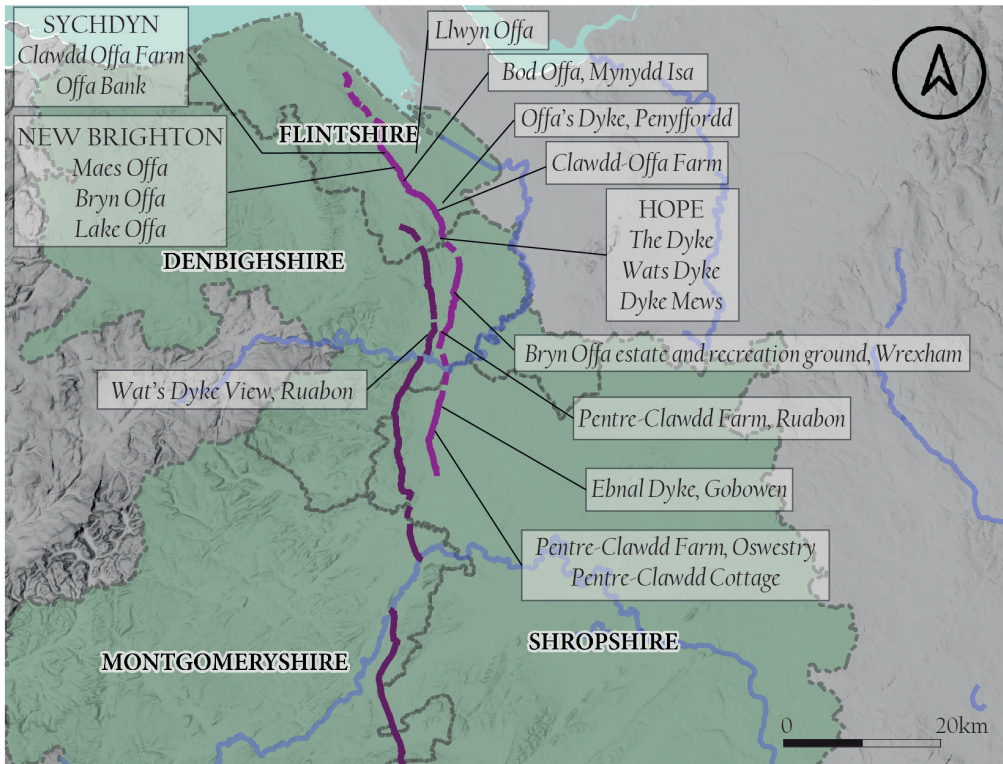


Figure 12: House-names citing Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

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.⁵ 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;

⁵ 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.

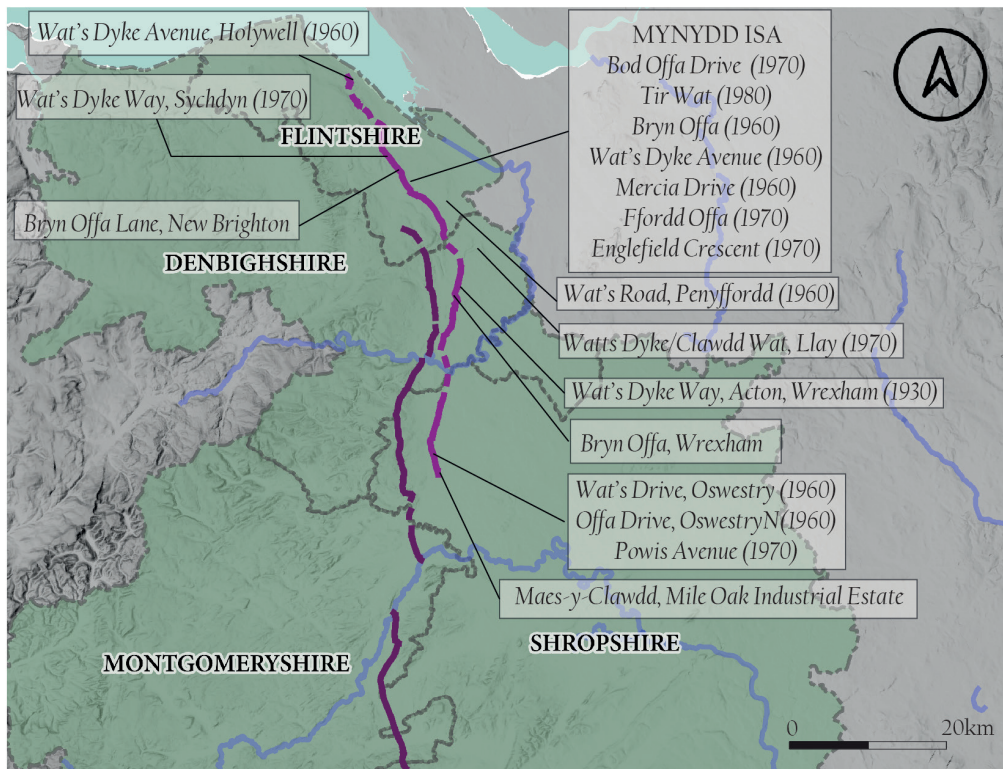


Figure 13: Street-names citing Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

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, Penyffordd, 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, Penyffordd (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.⁶ 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

⁶ <https://www.offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk/>

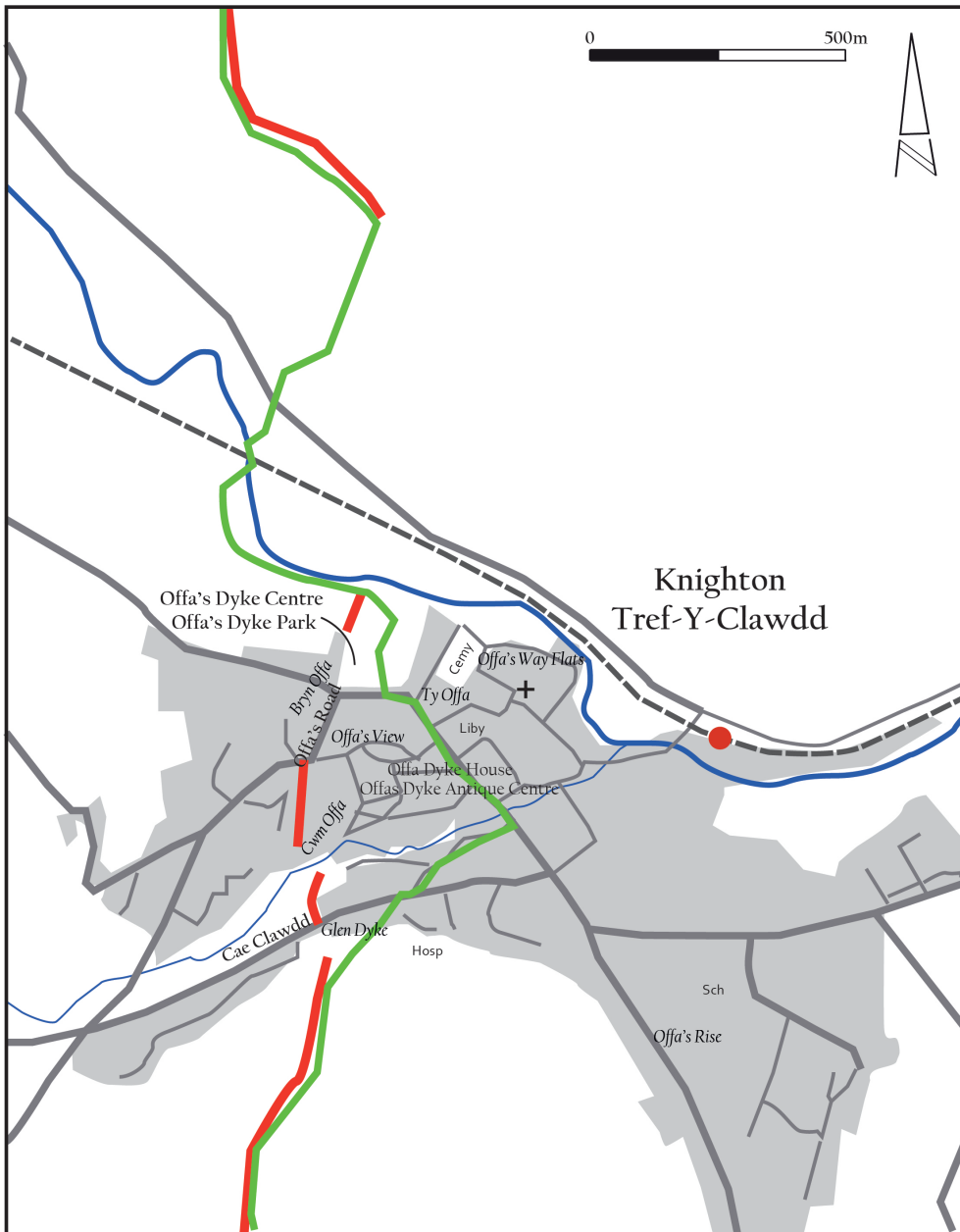


Figure 17: Map of Knighton/Tref-Y-Clawdd, Powys, showing the surviving line of Offa's Dyke (red), the Offa's Dyke Path (green) and the house, street and business names citing Offa's Dyke, plus the Offa's Dyke Centre and Offa's Dyke Park (Map by Howard Williams)

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)

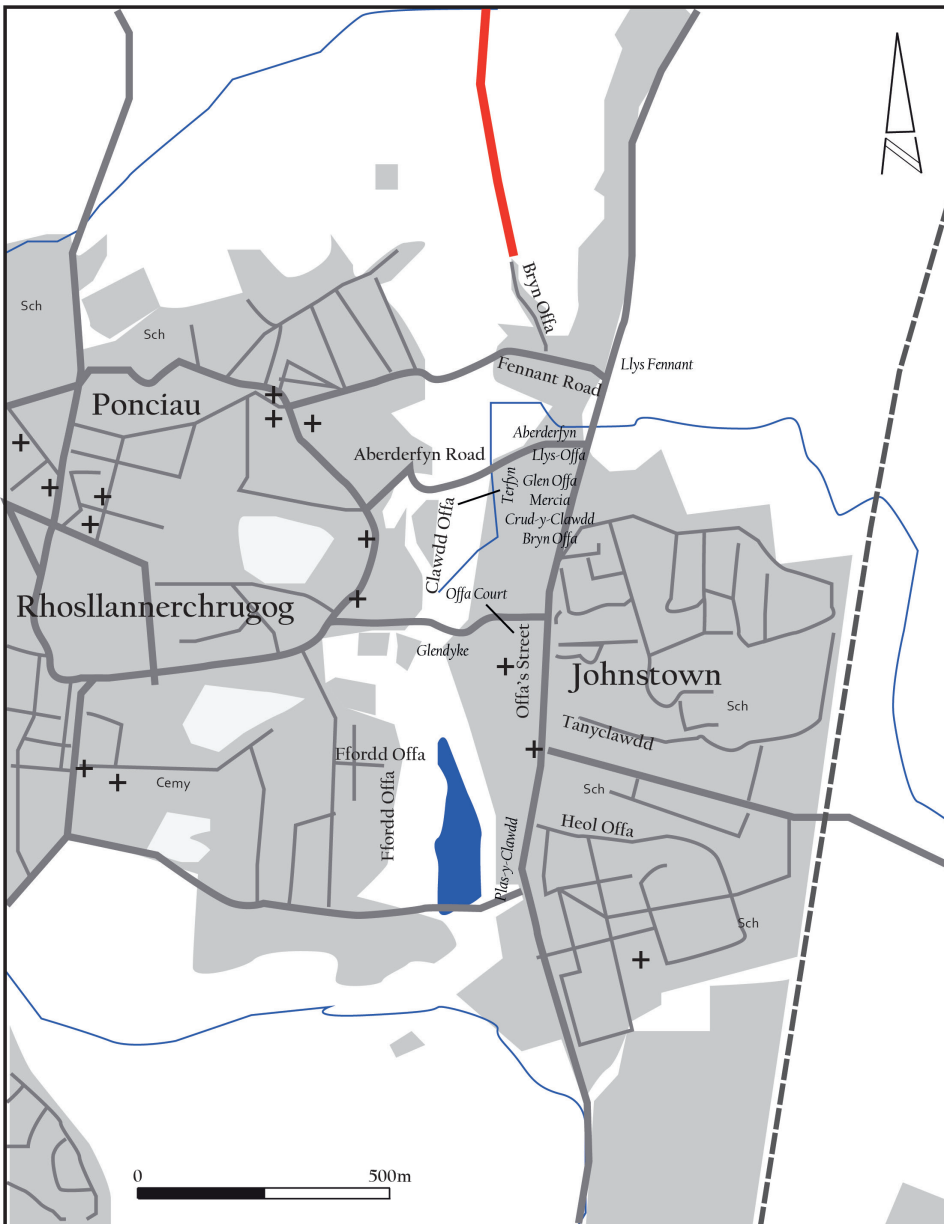


Figure 19: Map of Johnstown, Wrexham, showing Offa's Dyke (red) and the house and street names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams)

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

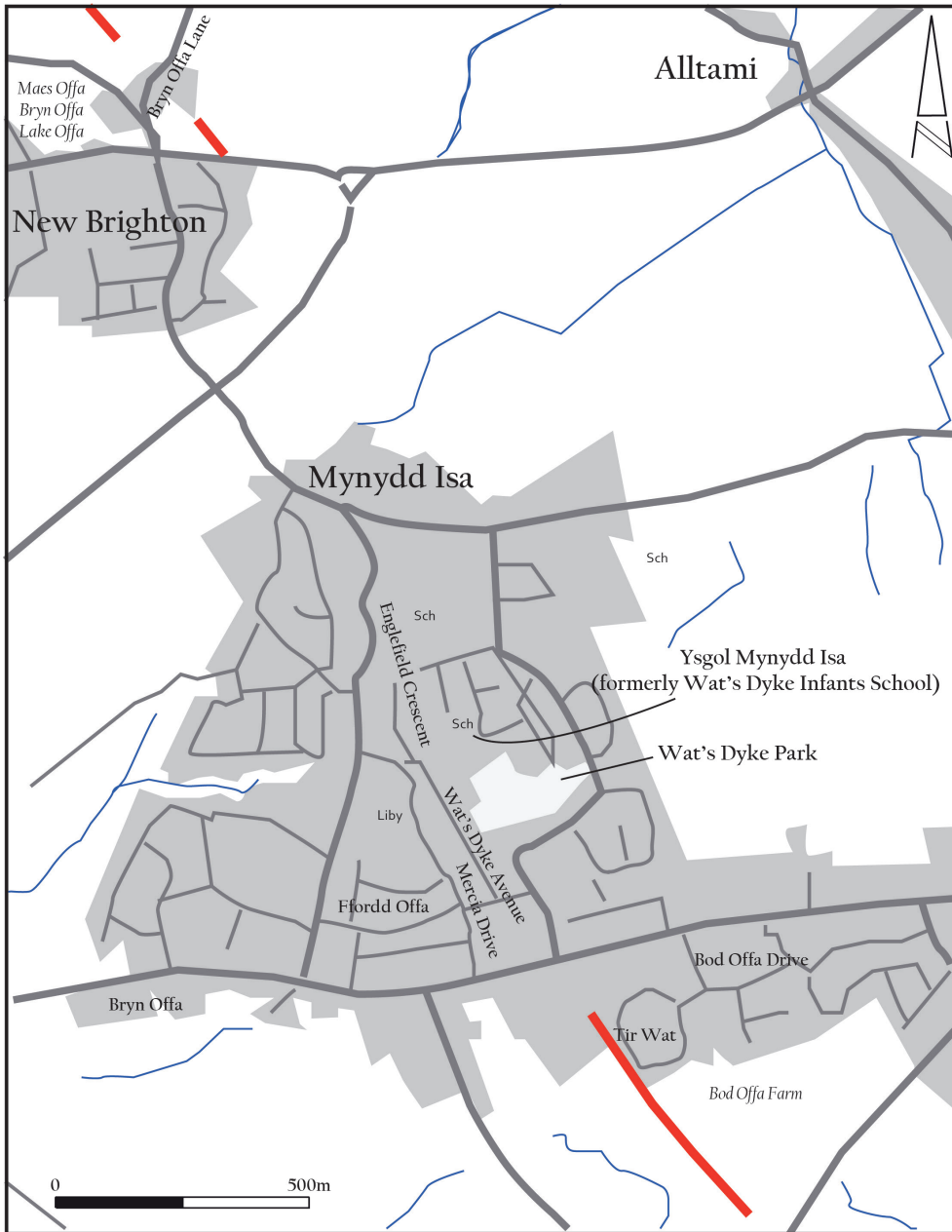


Figure 23: Map of Mynydd Issa and New Brighton, Flintshire, showing the surviving line of Wat's Dyke (red) and the house and street names citing Wat's Dyke, as well as Ysgol Mynydd Issa (formerly Wat's Dyke Infants School) and Wat's Dyke Park (Map by Howard Williams).

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



Figure 24: The sign for Wat's Dyke Park, Mynydd Isa, Flintshire (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 enfolded 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.⁷

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

⁷ 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.⁸

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

⁸ <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).⁹ 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’

⁹ 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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Offa's and Wat's Dykes

David Hill

David Hill and Margaret Worthington Hill's Offa's Dyke Project made a sustained contribution to the study of both Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke. To celebrate and reflect on this legacy, we have secured permission to reproduce David Hill's 1991 book chapter 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes' in the Offa's Dyke Journal. The article has been edited for style and includes a new introduction, re-drawn maps, the original section drawings, plus one of the original photographs. Citations have been added to key works available at the time of Hill's writing. Further citations have been added to help readers link Hill's arguments to more recent publications. Published electronically for the first time, we hope Hill's work reaches new audiences and re-energises the enthusiasm and efforts of enthusiasts, students and specialists alike in Britain's longest early medieval linear earthworks.

Keywords: Clwyd, Offa's Dyke, Offa's Dyke Project, Wales, Wat's Dyke.

Preface by Howard Williams

First published in the long out-of-print *The Archaeology of Clwyd* edited by John Manley, Stephen Greuter and Fiona Gale (Hill 1991), David Hill reviews and synthesises key results from his long-term project to investigate this pairing of linear earthworks. The study was placed in the original book between surveys of the 'Dark Ages' by Nancy Edwards and a quartet of chapters on later medieval archaeology – 'Mottes and Moated Sites' by Jack Spurgeon; 'The Stone Castles' by David Cathcart King, 'Medieval Settlement' by Glandville Jones' and 'Vernacular Architecture' by A.J. Parkinson. Nearly 30 years on, Hill's chapter is worthy of reproduction for multiple reasons.

First, Hill's chapter contains valuable information not published elsewhere about his University of Manchester fieldwork: the Offa's Dyke Project, including discussions and illustrations of ditch-sections from the project's excavations on Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn and Rhydyn Hall, Hope, and Offa's Dyke at Llanfynydd. These are otherwise unavailable in print to date. The same applies also to a photograph of the excavation of Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn.¹ The chapter also includes a map depicting where Wat's Dyke might have once ran, including a section between New Brighton and Mynydd Isa based on the results of resistivity survey (Figure 9).

Second, the chapter remains a rare instance where both Wat's and Offa's Dykes are considered together and in relationship as part of the same 'earthwork complex'. Thus, Hill set a precedent yet to be fully adopted of giving Wat's Dyke due attention when it is frequently side-lined in academic discussions of Offa's Dyke. As such, Hill's work serves as a companion to the reproduction of Margaret Worthington Hill's 1997 article on Wat's

Dyke, recently republished with additional figures in *Offa's Dyke Journal* 1 (Worthington 1997; Worthington Hill 2019). This is especially important when set against the backdrop that, in their book *Offa's Dyke: History and Guide*, Hill and Worthington (2003: 162–163) dedicate only a paragraph and one illustration to Wat's Dyke and none of the details of their excavations were published therein. Likewise, subsequent research has focused on either one or the other monument (e.g. Malim and Hayes 2008; Belford 2017; Ray and Bapty 2016, but see Belford 2019).

Third, the chapter is a useful snapshot of Hill's thinking and approach to the dykes after twenty years of fieldwork through the 1970s and 1980s. Notably, Hill is outspokenly critical of both Fox's survey and his inferences. The structured approach of Hill's work tackles key and broad questions regarding both monuments: 'what', 'where' and 'when' are tackled before exploring the 'why', 'how' and 'who' of their construction. Notably, Hill's brief one-sentence conclusion is important since it points to still under-investigated parallels with other linear frontier and borderland linear monuments of the past and recent times.

Hill sadly passed away in 2011 and an edited collection honouring his work was published soon after (Owen-Crocker and Thompson 2014). Despite his achievements, it remains frustrating to students and scholars of the Mercian linear earthworks that further details of the Offa's Dyke Project's surveys and excavations were not published. Consequently, Hill's published assertions of 'conclusive proof' regarding the presence and character of the monuments are still not adequately substantiated. Moreover, the county of Clwyd was abolished in 1996. Despite these caveats, the chapter is worthy of reproduction and it contains insights of value to the student and researcher today. In addition to the points above, it is worth noting that Hill's evaluation of the Whitford Dyke has been borne out by further research (Jones 2018). Furthermore, his vivid speculation regarding the rationale and planning of the monuments has an enduring appeal (expanded upon in Hill and Worthington 2003), including the suggestion that Wat's Dyke was 'better engineered' and perhaps succeed Offa's Dyke (Malim and Hayes 2008).

This richly illustrated study can now be made available again in a new open-access digital format. It is worthy of attention today both as a snapshot of the work done and its intellectual context, but also because many of its questions and approaches remain pertinent to current thinking about the construction, placement and significance of Britain's greatest linear earthworks.

Introduction

Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke together form the largest archaeological monument complex in Britain. It must follow, therefore, that the dykes are also the largest

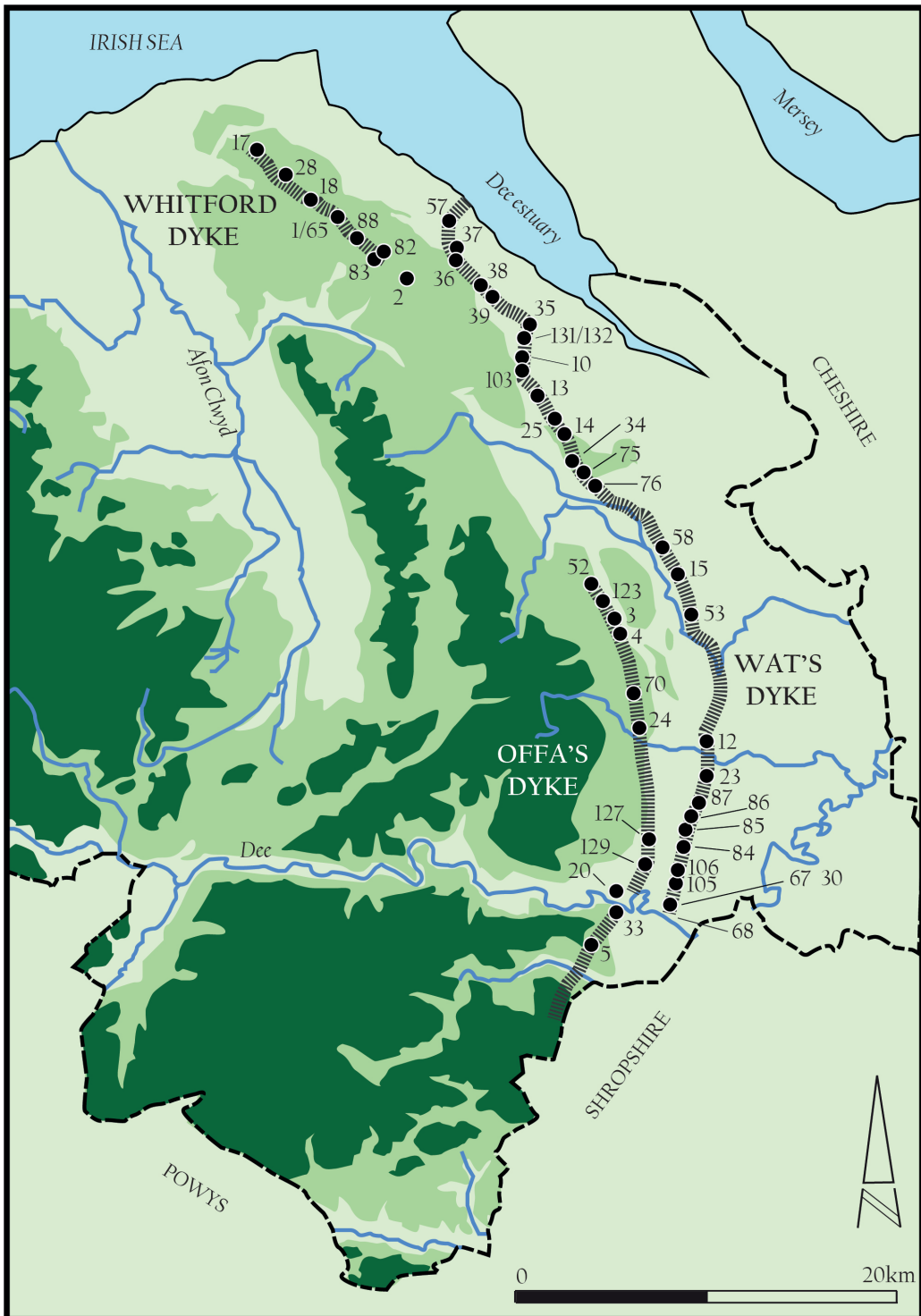


Figure 1: Distribution map showing sites excavated in Clwyd along the length of Offa's and Wat's Dykes, and the Whitford Dyke

archaeological monuments in Clwyd,² but are they the most, or even among the most important, archaeological monuments in Clwyd?

These earthworks, comprising of banks each with a ditch on their west (Welsh) side, enter the county in the south. Offa's Dyke crosses the Ceiriog at Chirk Castle (SJ 264 376) and Wat's Dyke (near SJ 300 410) crosses the Dee at Ruabon (Wynnstay Park).³ They both mark off the high ground, Offa's Dyke running along the eastern limit of the plateau and Wat's Dyke along the western edge of the plain. However, Offa's Dyke turns swiftly into a side valley and peters out near Llanfynydd (SJ 274 573) having completed only 13 miles (20km) of the way to the Irish Sea coast. The altogether more impressive and well-engineered Wat's Dyke passes through Wrexham and then follows the north and east side of the Alyn valley, skirts Mold and runs parallel to the Dee estuary marking off the better agricultural land before reaching the Irish Sea coast at Basingwerk (SJ 198 775), a distance of 28 miles (45km). In addition, there is a piece of earthwork of indeterminate length traditionally called Offa's Dyke (and which we now generally refer to as the 'Whitford Dyke') which is to be found inland from the sea at Trelawnynd (SJ 104 793) and at Whitford (SJ 130 771). This earthwork will be discussed in detail later.

Offa's Dyke would appear to be an eighth-century work associated with Offa, King of Mercia and essentially the overlord of southern Britain (AD 757–796).⁴ Wat's Dyke is therefore dated by analogy to roughly the same period; Stenton (1955: xviii) suggested the reign of Aethelbald (AD 716–757). In reality, however, there is no secure dating for Wat's Dyke.⁵

Are the Dykes important? They are certainly large and they deserve respect and protection, but what else? The Dykes split off a third of the county on the east and two-thirds on the west and they thus indicate the dual heritage of this border shire with its long English history in the east and the Celtic-speaking heritage to the west (Figure 1). The Dykes are thus two fixed points in a very long (and ill-recorded) period when Britons and Saxon confronted each other but where the east of the present county was permanently Anglian or Saxon. The Domesday distributions confirm this (Figure 2). However, the frontier was fluid: we should recognise that *Cledemutha* was built as a *burh* by Edward the Elder (Edwards 1991). Earlier, it may be that from 826 until the battle of the Conwy in 881, for at least two generations, all of Clwyd was under Mercian rule.

Secondly, the Dykes should tell us of the nature of English settlement, and its organisation, by the predominant Mercian kingdom of the period 750–850, into a defensive net against Welsh raids.

² From 1996 divided into Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham.

³ Subsequently, scholars have presumed it does not cross the Dee but follows it to the Dee/Ceiriog confluence, see Worthington 1997; Worthington Hill 2019.

⁴ The original publication stated '759–98'.

⁵ See Malim and Hayes 2008 for the first published dates of Wat's Dyke at Gobowen, which suggested the possibility of a later date of construction, during the reigns of Cenwulf and Ceolwulf (AD 796–823).

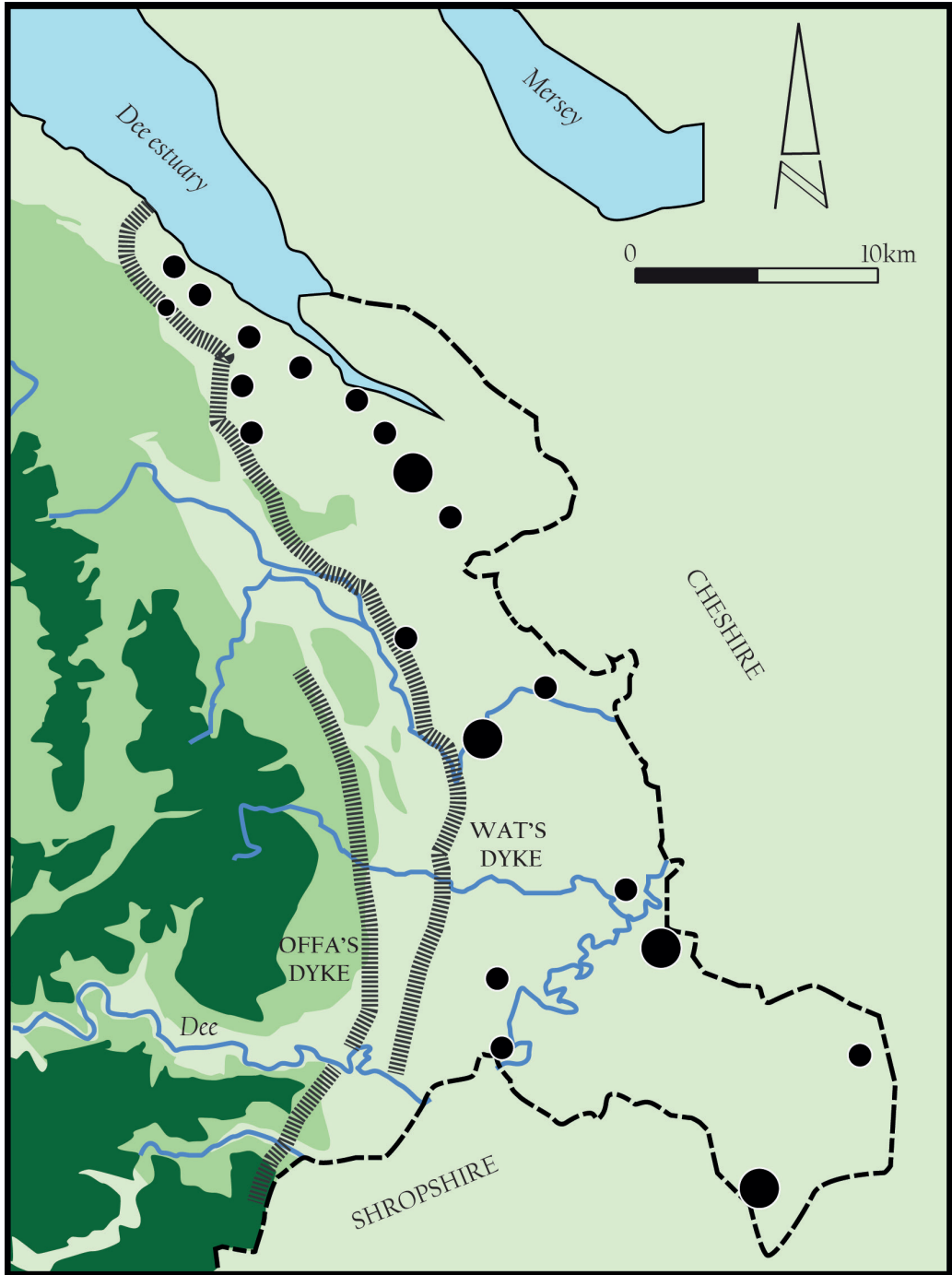


Figure 2: 'English' settlements in Clwyd at the time of Domesday in 1086. Note that all the settlements are east of Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke



Figure 3: An oblique aerial view of Offa's Dyke west of Rhostyllen near Wrexham. The Dyke is often preserved under later field boundaries and in the photograph runs from bottom-left to top-right. The photograph looks north-north-west. Cadwgan Hall is in the centre of the photograph, the crossing of the Clywedog at the top of the image

Thirdly, the monuments mark off the Welsh kingdoms and they ought to give some insight into those problems that Nancy Edwards deals with elsewhere (Edwards 1991), the nature of the Welsh kingdoms and their economy. For across this barrier of the dykes we should expect movements; not simply the attempt at criminal or military movements, raids and warfare; but we must ask ourselves how the large economy of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms affected the smaller Welsh kingdoms? Should we not expect traders as well as raiders? And should this not be reflected archaeologically in passageways through the linear earthworks? Should we not expect toll-stations, customs posts or other control points? Did salt, pottery or silver pass the frontier and if so in what form? There seems to be no known trade demonstrated by artefacts or finds from the collapse of Roman rule until the tenth-century coinage of Hywel Dda.⁶

⁶ The equation of the dykes with a 'border' between Welsh and English-speaking peoples is a long-standing assumption. See Hill and Worthington (2003) and Ray and Bapty (2016: 254–297) for different perspectives on the relationships between the dykes and the Mercian frontier.

The business of the archaeologist is to recreate the past, to allow us to visualise the past in the context of the physical remains and it must be admitted that in relation to the dykes this is not easy, they are a ‘dead monument in an empty landscape’ (see Hill and Worthington 2003: 46) (Figure 3). It is possible to suggest the sequence of events leading to its construction. However, it is more difficult to suggest how, or if, the monuments ‘worked’. We might proceed more efficiently in evaluating these monuments’ importance if we asked ourselves the questions of ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, and ‘why’.

I keep six honest serving-men;
 (They taught me all I knew)
 Their names are What and Why and When
 And How and Where and Who.
 (Kipling 1902: 59)

What?

The Dykes are best described in terms of ‘what’ by considering Site 25, Sychdyn (Figure 4). Wat’s Dyke, here near Mold, consists of a low earthen bank today crowned with hedges or trees about 1–1.5m high with a shallow, sometimes waterlogged, ditch in front of it. The whole construction is some 2.4m across. When excavated, however, the shallow ditch turns out to be 6m wide and some 2.4m deep with a cleaning slot at the bottom. Behind this considerable obstacle, the bank appears to consist of a turf front with an earth bank itself stabilised with layers of turf. From a reconstruction of the shape of the bank it probably stood originally some 2m high. If one postulates a palisade, then the whole obstruction from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the palisade would have been 6m high. In Clwyd, the question of a palisade or wall may have been answered by Site 52, Llanfynydd Schoolfield (SJ 279 567). This site was excavated to confirm that Offa’s Dyke had reached to this point; it was being assumed that the road marked the line of the bank of the Dyke. In the Schoolfield, at the base of the bank upon which the road was constructed, the ditch was located (Figure 5). In the primarily silt of the ditch were blocks of stone; the interpretation was therefore that the bank had been crowned by an unmortared stone wall. With or without a wall or palisade on the top or an *abattis* of thorn in the ditch, the Dyke would have been a very considerable barrier.

Where?

‘Where’ is a problem of great complexity which the Offa’s Dyke Project has concerned itself with for many years and with considerable success. It is a controversial matter and will have to be discussed here. The simplest Dyke is Wat’s Dyke so let us start with that. The line runs clearly northwards from Wynnstay Park in Ruabon (SJ 303 423)

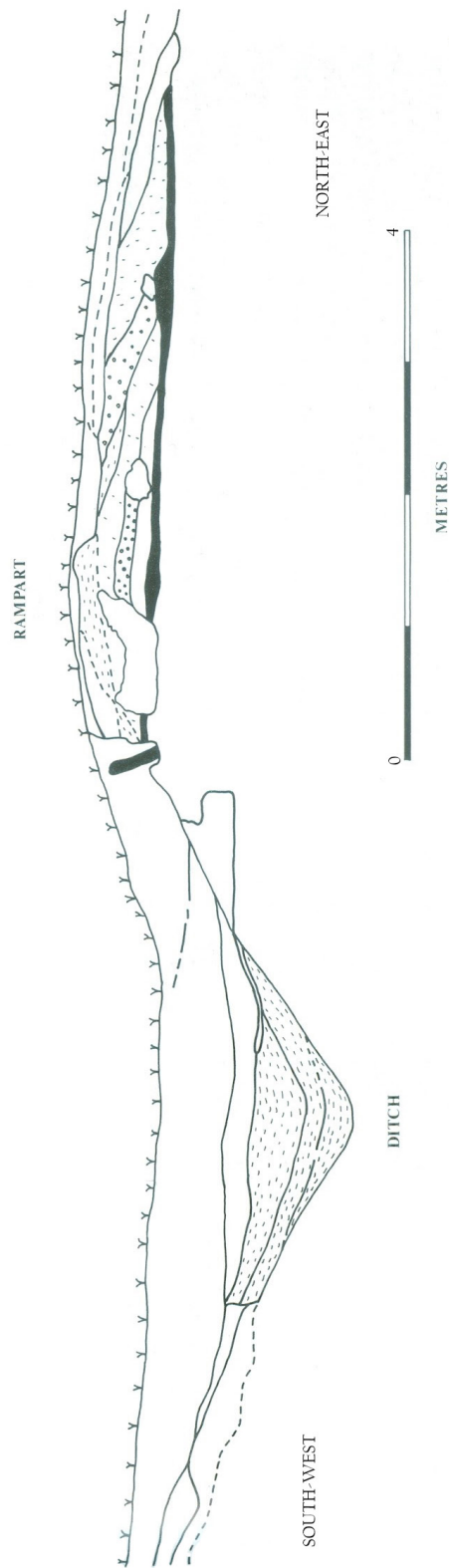


Figure 4: A section excavated across Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn near Mold which clearly revealed the former extent of the wide ditch (Note: the editors have changed the scale from 20m to 4m, presuming the original scale to be an error)

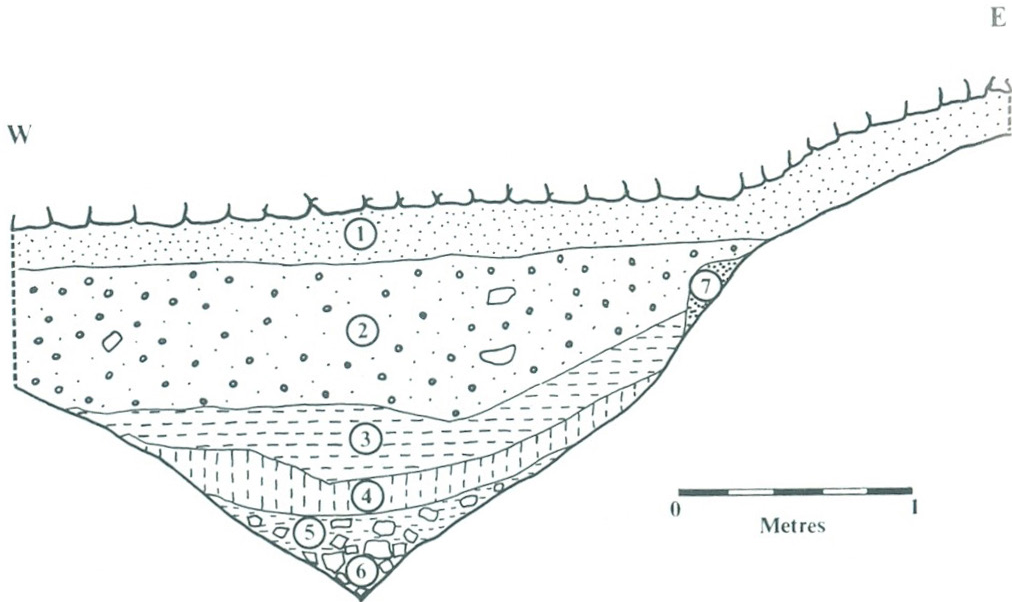


Figure 5: A section across Offa's Dyke at Llanfynydd (Flintshire). Offa's Dyke has not yet been shown to run further north than Llanfynydd

over Pentre Clawdd Hill (SJ 313 443) to Erddig (SJ 326 485) and through Wrexham: all this is as described by Sir Cyril Fox. However, at the River Alyn (SJ 333 534) Fox lost the line of the earthworks and disbelieved the Ordnance Survey (OS) (Figure 6). The surveyors of the Ordnance Survey had felt that they could recognise Wat's Dyke for two thirds of the distance of 5.4km whereas Fox declared 'the Alyn ravine itself represented the line of the frontier'. Now these are loaded expressions, for to call the Alyn a 'ravine' conjures up to the armchair or library-fast archaeologist a picture which is not the situation on the ground. At most seasons of the year the Alyn can be forded at any point and the sides of the ravine can easily be climbed. The 'ravine' is a clear landscape feature and a considerable natural obstacle, but 'ravine' implies impassibility for the stretch of 5.6km and this description is not appropriate. In fact, at Site 53, Hope, Rhydym Hall (SJ 312 569) Eric Foster excavated the ditch of the Dyke (Hill and Worthington 2003: 186) (Figure 7). The 'known' line of the Dyke can therefore be extended over much of the distance. Fox's line continues from Hope past Mold to the Afon Conwy west of Northop; here Fox thought the Dyke had never been completed although he recognised short sections at Holywell and at the Nant-y-Flint.

it can hardly be doubted that these were constructed to bar access to the coastal flat between Basingwerk and Flint at the only points where natural obstacles were non-existent. In the case of the latter, construction was started on either flank of the vulnerable portion but was not carried to the centre... When it is remembered that incompleteness, equally

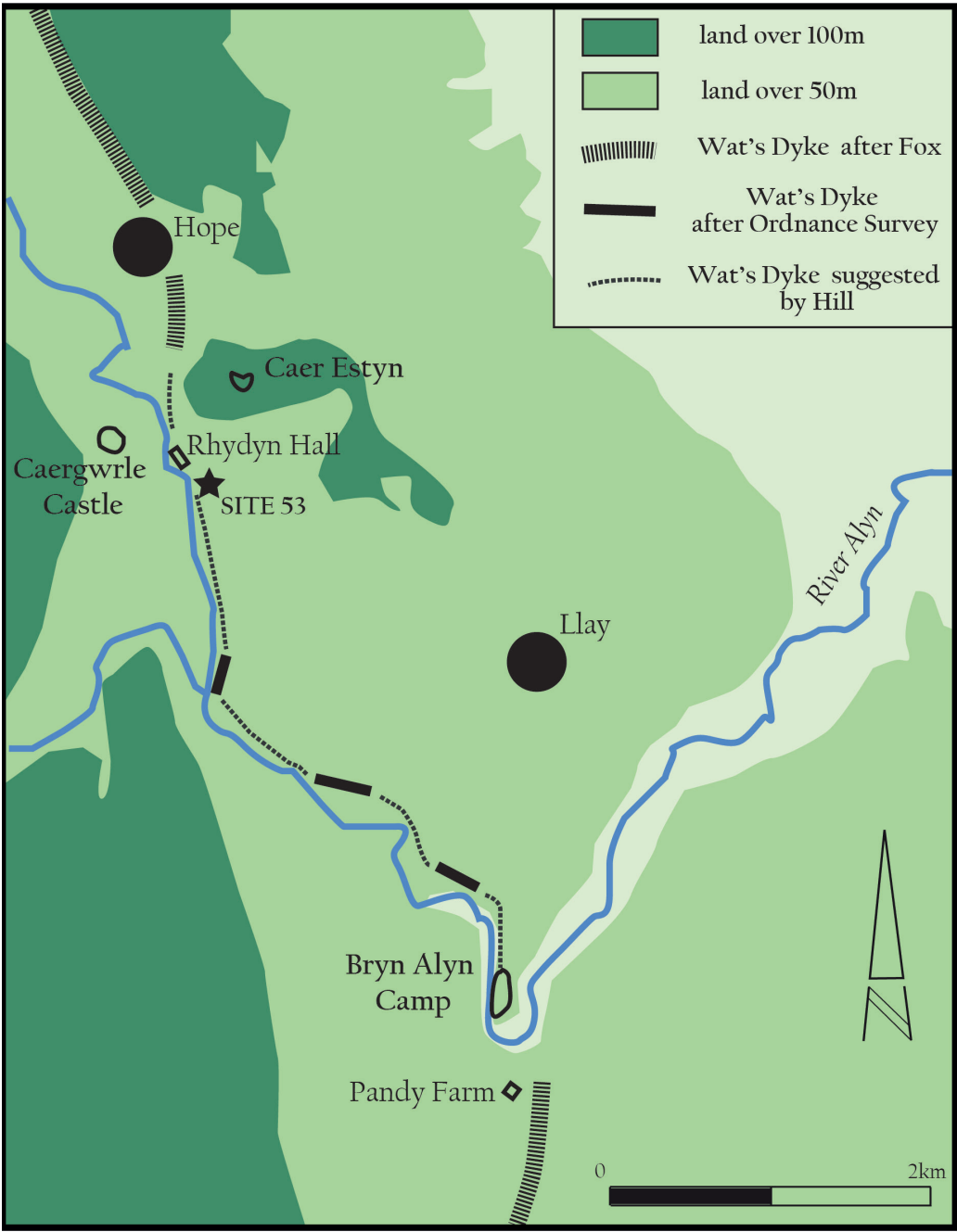


Figure 6: Suggested line of Wat's Dyke in the Alyn valley near Wrexham. According to Sir Cyril Fox, the Dyke did not exist in this area but more recent work has discovered new lengths of the Dyke

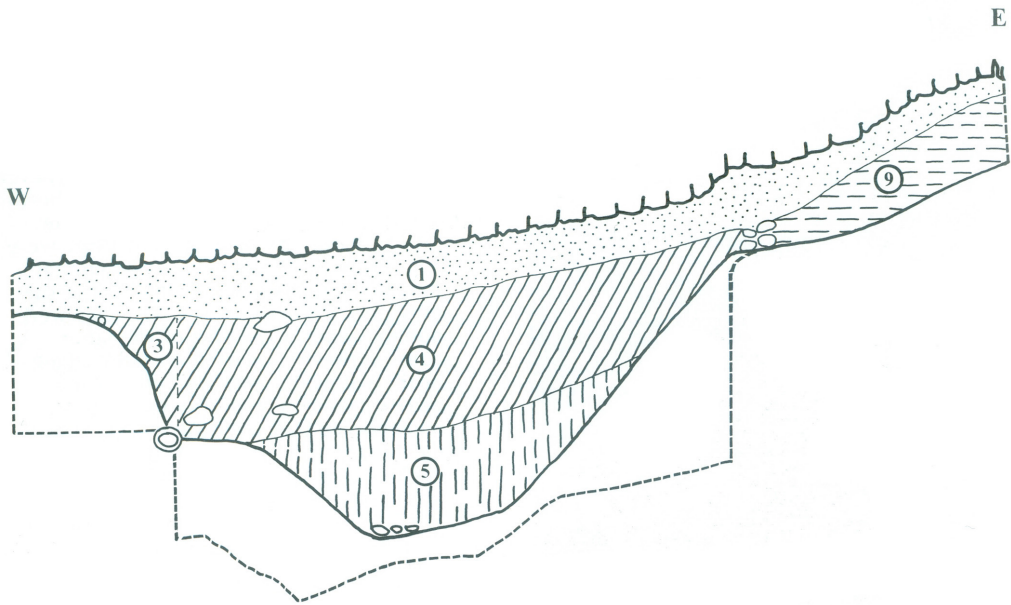


Figure 7: Excavated section across Wat's Dyke at Rhydlyn Hall. Again the original size and extent of the ditch can clearly be seen

inexplicable on topographical grounds, marks Offa's Dyke in this region, it is legitimate to suggest that – to the Mercians – it was a remote, difficult, and dangerous countryside, and that in the case of both Dykes the constructional and perhaps the military effort involved was too great to be sustained to the end. The attempted construction of Wat's Dyke hereabouts shows how essential to the Mercians the control of the south shore of the Dee estuary must have been, presumably as helping to secure the safety of Chester. (Fox 1955: 263)

Now, this section of Wat's Dyke shows Fox to be deeply confused about the area, having to square its 'incompleteness' with its strategic importance by a take of bungling. It is even more difficult to understand the paucity of the fieldwork. Figure 8 shows a completely different picture to that claimed by Fox, in fact only in two areas on this stretch from where Fox thought it terminated near Northop to its actual termination on the coast are there still sections of the Dyke yet unrecognised. A number of excavations have taken place (Table 1).

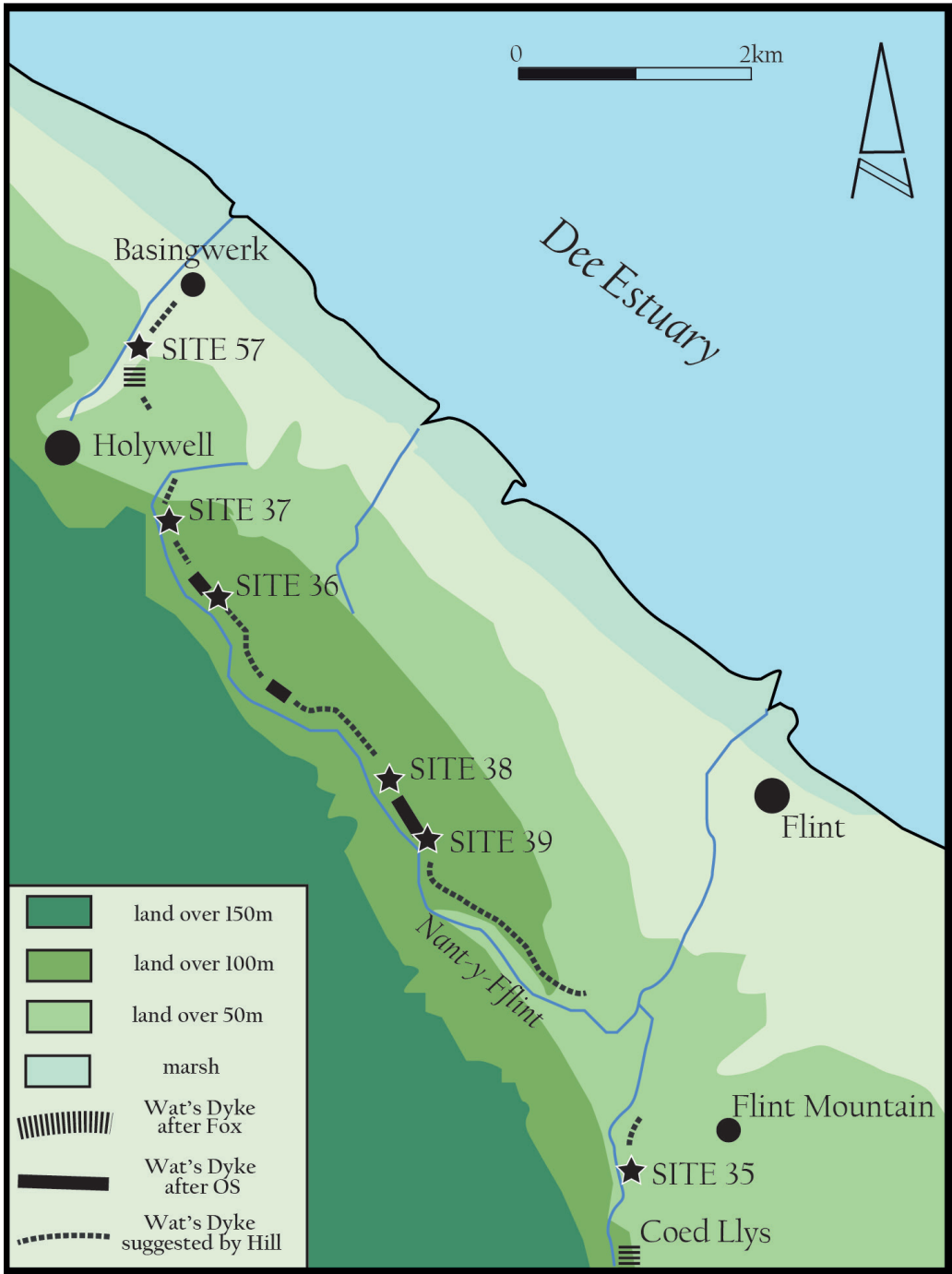


Figure 8: The northern end of Wat's Dyke between Flint and Holywell. Sir Cyril Fox thought that the Dyke had never been completed in this area, despite its strategic importance. Once again recent work has shown that the Dyke was originally continuous



Figure 9: Results of a resistivity survey across fields at Bryn-y-Bâl near Mold indicate the line of Wat's Dyke, although its existence here has not yet been proven conclusively by excavation

Table 1: The Offa's Dyke Project's investigations on the line of Wat's Dyke revealing fresh evidence for the monument.

Site	Place	National Grid Reference
36	Holywell, Coetia Clwyd	SJ 198 745
37	Coed Llwybr-y-bi	SJ 196 747
38	Flint, Bethel Chapel	SJ 213 731
39	Flint, Fernside Cottage	SJ 216 727
57	Holywell, Coed Strand	SJ 917 698
138	Flint, Northop Bypass	SJ 232 698

There really can be no doubt that the Dyke has been conclusively proved as passing through these areas. The discovery of these two important stretches within Clwyd, at the Alyn valley and in the north, is a major achievement of the Offa's Dyke Project.

If one looks at the line of Wat's Dyke in simplified plans it is noticeable that such maps as appear in *Domesday Geography of England* (Darby 1971) or the *Ordnance Survey Map of Dark Age Britain* (OS 1966) show smaller gaps in the line in Clwyd. We have dealt with the major gaps in the areas of the Alyn and the norther termination. It is towards two smaller gaps that we should now turn. These were considered to be caused, according to Sir Cyril Fox, by forest so dense that a man could not pass. I have dealt with these gaps elsewhere and we have proved, archaeologically, that these gaps are caused by agriculture and the

Dyke had been originally continuous. The proof is still lacking at Bryn-y-Bâl where we have suggested a line across the fields (Figure 9). Offa's Dyke is, however, more fractious. It runs continuously along the plateau edge through Coedpoeth (SJ 293 540) and into the Cegidog Valley (SJ 284 554). From there, the Dyke is lost at Llanfynydd; it *may* run up the hill towards Treuddyn for some way as the Ordnance Survey shows it, for it is certain that it is at Site 52 (SJ 279 567) in Llanfynydd. What happens is uncertain and the very attractive idea (to me at least) that Offa's Dyke then linked to the north with Wat's Dyke, argued in two previous notes, cannot now be sustained, at least in its original form (Hill 1974). The 1974 theory suggested that the original line of Offa's Dyke came from the south to Llanfynydd in the way described above and then crossed over to Wat's Dyke 'corner' (perhaps at SJ 268 627) and followed Wat's Dyke to the sea. This would have made the whole of Wat's Dyke south of the 'corner' phase II or the replacement of Offa's Dyke. Three excavations (Table 2) reveal the fact that the structure of Wat's Dyke at these two widely separated points on the north and on the south of the 'corner' are such that it is almost certain that they are of the same 'build' and constructed by the same people at the same time. At the time, the two notes mentioned above, considered that the place-names on the Dyke were significant. However, there now appear to be 'Wat's Dyke' names on Offa's Dyke; 'Offa' names on the Wat's Dyke; the possibility that Offa's Dyke was called in one section (not in Clwyd) *Rough Ditch* similar to the present derivation of the Herefordshire *Rowe Ditch*: and finally the Wrexham stretch of Wat's Dyke was probably called *Devil's Ditch* (on the original drawings for the first edition of the Ordnance Survey now in the Map Room of the British Museum). In view of all this I feel that the place-name evidence should be left to someone more qualified to discuss it.

Table 2: excavations near Hope and Mold by the Offa's Dyke Project

Site	Place	National Grid Reference
15	Hope, Pigeon House Farm	SJ 206 593
75	Mold Rural, Watergate Estate	SJ 263 637
76	Mold Rural, Bod Offa Farm	SJ 264 636

What is clear is that the structure known as Offa's Dyke at Ysceifiog, Whitford and Trelawnyd, is not similar to any other section of Offa's or Wat's Dykes. The gap of 30.6km from the last known point at Llanfynydd (Site 52) should warn us of problems and the prevalence of short dykes in the central Marches offer a parallel to this exposed fragment. It is the nature of the excavated and observed dyke, consisting as it does of a low earthwork between two quarry ditches (Table 3) which is clear proof that this earthwork is not part of the Offa's Dyke system although we still await confirmation of its date⁷. This earthwork does not exist at Ysceifiog (Site 2) and we have demonstrated the termination of this Dyke at Pen-y-Gelli wood (Site 83, SJ 135 764). There was no sign of any earthworks in the considerable cut made between Ysceifiog and Pen-y-Gelli wood by the road improvements to the A55 at Site 121 (SJ 136 759).

There are still major problems associated with the line of both Wat’s Dyke (with detailed work still being needed on the crossing of the Afon Conwy and within the confines of Holywell) with Whitford Dyke where we do not know its western end and with the northern end of Offa’s Dyke to the north of site 52 at Llanfynydd.

When

When were the Dykes built? It would obviously be perverse to argue against the entire in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* written by a Welshman at the West Saxon court in 893 associating the Dyke with Offa in the late eighth century. And this traditional view of the dating is borne out by the place-name of the Dyke and the traditions attached to it. It is certain that the Dyke has always been known; knowledge of it has not been lost and the knowledge attaching it to the great Mercian king survived through the Middle Ages to appear on the first of the maps and to be recorded by the first of the antiquaries. However, it should be noted that the statement by Asser and its context is important. Asser spends a considerable amount of time recounting the infamy of a certain wife of a West Saxon king, a tale quite suitable for the collections of the brothers Grimm. This lady was accused of all kinds of misdemeanours not least in accidentally poisoning King Beorhtric, her husband, in 802 whilst successfully poisoning a ‘certain young man very dear to the king’: apparently a pastime in which she often indulged. In the midst of this fable, told to explain why the West Saxons did not afford the title of ‘Queen’ to the wife of the King, Asser offers the information:

There was in Mercia in fairly recent times a certain vigorous king called Offa, who terrified all the neighbouring kings and provinces around him, and who had a great dyke built between Wales and Mercia from sea to sea.

Rex nomine Offa, qui vallum magnum inter Britainnium atque Merciam de mari usque ad mare fieri imperavit.

The only other evidence we have for the date of the Dykes is the fact that Offa’s Dyke had been shown archaeologically to overlie, and therefore be later than, Roman remains at Frith (SJ 284 553) (Fox 1955: 40–44).⁸

Why, how and who?

So to ‘why’ and ‘how’ and ‘who’. The reason lying behind the construction of such an enormous work has led to people making guesses about its use for centuries. Until this century those guesses were seen almost entirely in terms of warfare and defence although there were some guesses which saw it as a legal barrier. However, Fox suggested that the whole thing was ‘an agreed frontier’ and quoted in evidence two places where he thought that the line of the earthworks demonstrated this.

It should be noted, however, that the line of the Dyke does not prove that Offa's Dyke is an agreed frontier. A possible scenario for the construction of Offa's Dyke is as follows:

1. There were a series of devastating raids into England that Offa and the Mercians could not answer. Attempts to reply by counter-raids did not succeed and the farmers in the border area abandoned their fields and withdrew.⁹
2. The king decided to apply a typical Dark Age solution and faced the most hostile Welsh kingdoms with a bank and ditch (these are known both on the continent, in East Anglia and with the Wansdyke in Wiltshire).
3. The king and his advisors, possibly an ealdorman (the highest rank of Saxon official) talked it over with the council or *witan* and decided on a line for the works to follow. What is difficult to conceive for those days before maps is the intense understanding of the shape of the kingdom and the depth of local knowledge that allowed them to plan the line.
4. Rough sightings were probably made and checked with beacon fires for line.
5. The crisis in the area could not have been very great for there was time to survey and layout the line making the very best use of the landscape, the hillsides, and rivers. Long lines were laid out so that they took into account the number of river crossings (always a weak point) and the control of fords. A line was worked out which always attempted to be in a strong position with good visual command to the west.
6. Enormous fires were lit to clear the ground and the sight lines. A plough marked out the line in the open fields and pastures. Marker posts were erected on some stretches and in particularly difficult or complex parts there were built small banks and ditches as marking out features.
7. During the winter, the king, meeting with his *witan*, ordered men from every village and settlement under his control (and we have a tribute list of the time, the *Tribal Hidage*) to report to the frontier, probably under their own reeves and ealdormen, where they were assigned their areas of work. Those who did not go on this construction expedition would have contributed to those that did (one could expect about 5 men to a village) by loaning tools, ponies, giving food and providing other support. It probably would be constructed in the late spring or early summer, at the Rogation days, the traditional time for such work in medieval Europe, just before Whitsuntide.¹⁰
8. On arrival at the marking out bank or plough mark, each group would find the length they had been assigned and they would set about digging and building this section.
9. The turf would be stripped off and, in most cases, used to stabilise the bank, it would also be used to build the front. Using whatever local materials were to hand, stone if

⁹ See Ray and Bapty 2016 for alternative scenarios.

¹⁰ See Hill and Worthington 2003 for further details.

they could find it in easy blocks, or timber, they would construct a palisade or wall. In a very short time the ditch and bank would also grow its obstruction of blackthorn and bramble.

10. The work was then ready. How precisely it worked I am unsure, and so it is clear that much more work is left to do.
11. However, it was not a success and the better engineered, thought-out and constructed Wat’s Dyke replaced it. The line also includes a series of hillforts and strong points; were these in use?¹¹
12. Even this did not succeed and in 822 the Mercians invaded North Wales and ruled for two generations, thus doing away with the frontier raids that had led to the construction of the Dykes in the first place.

Modern parallels, such as the relations between Lebanon and the Israelis, may help us to understand these works, designed as barriers to raids rather than walls against major armies, and as such are to be seen throughout history.

Table 3: Excavations on Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke in the former county of Clwyd

Site	Parish, SITE NAME	Year of Excavation	Grid Reference	Monument Investigated
1	Whitford, BRYNBELLA	1926	SJ 129 771	WHIT
2	Ysceifiog, CIRCLE	1926	SJ 152 753	WHIT
3	Frith, VILLAGE	1927	SJ 284 553	OFFA
4	Frith, HALL	1927	SJ 288 548	OFFA
5	Chirk, CAEAU-GWYNION	1928	SJ 273 395	OFFA
10	Northop, MIDDLE MILL	1955	SJ 233 691	WATS
12	Acton, WAT’S DYKE SCHOOL	1975	SJ 334 523	WATS
13	Sychdyn, CLAWDD OFFA	1975	SJ 243 678	WATS
14	Mold, BYPASS	1976	SJ 257 653	WATS
15	Hope, PIGEON HOUSE FARM	1974	SJ 306 593	WATS
17	Trelawnyd, VILLAGE	1973	SJ 089 798	WHIT
18	Whitford, TRE-ABBOT-BACH	1973	SJ 112 784	WHIT
20	Cefn, WATERLOO TOWER	1976	SJ 285 422	OFFA
23	Wrexham, EXCHANGE STATION	1972	SJ 329 509	WATS
24	COEDPOETH	1973	SJ 293 512	OFFA
25	Sychdyn, PIPELINE	1974	SJ 252 659	WATS
28	Trelawnyd, PENTRE FFYDDION	1976	SJ 104 790	WHIT
30	Ruabon, WYNNSTAY PARK	1976	SJ 308 425	WATS
34	Mold Rural, MYNYDD ISA	1957	SJ 262 639	WATS

¹¹ See Belford 2017.

35	Flint Mountain, BRYN-Y-GARREG	1977	SJ 232 698	WATS
36	Holywell, COETIA CLWYD	1976	SJ 198 745	WATS
37	Flint, COED LLWYR-Y-BI	1977	SJ 196 747	WATS
38	Flint, BETHEL CHAPEL	1977	SJ 213 731	WATS
39	Flint, FERNSIDE COTTAGE	1977	SJ 216 726	WATS
52	Llanfynydd, SCHOOLFIELD	1978	SJ 279 567	WHIT
53	Hope, RHYDDYN HALL	1978	SJ 312 569	WATS
57	Holywell, Coed Strand, CUPID'S GROVE	1978	SJ 191 767	WATS
58	Hope, CLAWDD OFFA	1978	SJ 299 607	WATS
65	Whitford, BRYNBELLA	1979	SJ 129 771	WHIT
67	Ruabon, BOAT HOUSE	1980	SJ 308 432	WATS
68	Ruabon, NANT-Y-CAE-COCH	1980	SJ 307 423	WATS
70	BRYMBO, area of	1892	SJ 29 52	OFFA
75	Mold Rural, WATERGATE ESTATE	1981	SJ 263 637	WATS
76	Mold Rural, BOD OFFA FARM	1981	SJ 264 636	WATS
82	Whitford, RHYDWEN FARM	1981	SJ 133 766	WHIT
83	Whitford, PEN-Y-GELLI	1981	SJ 135 764	WHIT
84	Erddig, THE ROOKERY	1982	SJ 324 478	WATS
85	Erddig, CISTERN	1982	SJ 325 480	WATS
86	Erddig, BIG WOOD	1982	SJ 325 485	WATS
87	Wrexham Regis, COURT WOOD	1982	SJ 328 489	WATS
88	Whitford, CORNEL CAE	1982	SJ 125 775	WHIT
103	Northop, MIDDLE MILL	1984	SJ 233 691	WATS
105	Ruabon, PENTRE CLAWDD	1984	SJ 313 443	WATS
106	Ruabon, BLACK BROOK KNOLL	1984	SJ 321 456	WATS
121	Whitford, A55 IMPROVEMENT	1986	SJ 136 759	WHIT
123	Llanfynydd, COED ISA	1986	SJ 282 562	OFFA
127	Johnstown, HARRINGTON'S	1986	SJ 300 457	OFFA
129	Ruabon, TATHAM ROAD	1987	SJ 302 448	OFFA
131	Flint Mountain, COED LLYS	1987	SJ 232 698	WATS
132	Northop, COED LLYS	1987	SJ 232 698	WATS

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David Hill (1937–2011)

Grim's Ditch, Wansdyke, and the Ancient Highways of England: Linear Monuments and Political Control

Tim Malim

Published first in 2007, Tim Malim's review of Grim's Ditch and Wansdyke provides a valuable synthesis and exploration of key issues of wider application regarding the relationship between linear earthworks, movement, territoriality and politics in the later prehistoric and early historic societies in Britain. The author provides a new introduction, while the article has been revised to the format of the Offa's Dyke Journal by the editors.

Keywords: Grim's Ditch, Wansdyke, linear earthworks, routeways, Icknield Way, Ridgeway, movement, political control

Introduction to the 2019 reprint

This article was first published by the Clifton Antiquarian Society in 2010 (Proceedings, Volume 9: *Early Medieval Enquiries*) in hard copy only. With the launch of the new e-publication, the *Offa's Dyke Journal* allows this study to reach a much wider audience and I am grateful to the original editors (Abby George, Donovan Hawley, George Nash, John Swann and Laurie Waite) and the Clifton Antiquarian Society for their help in facilitating this.

My analysis of Wansdyke and the many Grim's Ditch monuments, and their relationship to ancient routeways, complements previous studies I have made of the linear earthworks in the Welsh Marches and the Cambridgeshire Dykes. The comparison of these types of monument from different parts of the country has been instructive in establishing what characteristics they hold in common, and whether their superficial appearance of similarity can extend to a coherent interpretation of their conceptual design and function. Variation also occurs, not only between these linear earthworks, but also within the record for discrete investigations along different parts of what is ostensibly the same monument. One reason for some variation may well be due to the date of construction and duration of the earthworks' uses, over which time maintenance and remodelling might have been needed. Hence, an imperative for future investigations must be to ensure a suite of techniques are employed to establish the dates of phases within the deposit sequence of both the banks and ditches of linear earthworks.

Although several interesting radiocarbon dates were obtained by Jonathan Erskine during his investigations of West Wansdyke, neither part of Wansdyke has had sufficient samples taken for a series of scientific dating techniques to provide a valid independent substantiation of its construction date and period of use. However, an

important contribution on the probable date of (East) Wansdyke has been made from documentary, place-name and historical analysis (Reynolds and Langlands 2006: 36–37) which I should have included in my original article, and therefore wish to draw attention to it in this introduction instead. In addition, more detailed information (including pottery evidence) on the Berkshire Grim's Ditch can be found in an article detailing the survey and fieldwork undertaken in the 1980s (Ford 1982), and I am grateful to both Andrew Reynolds and Steve Ford for sending me offprints and discussing the subject with me. I should also mention here a useful discussion by Bruce Eagles and Michael Allen, in which they examine the excavated evidence for East Wansdyke and refer to previous research by Tony Clark which suggested that worm action buried artefacts at a rate of 4cm over 10 years, thereby providing a useful indication of the very minimal duration of time between earthwork and Romano-British pottery deposition (Eagles and Allen 2018: 95–6). Their analysis, however, diverges from Clark's conclusions, and suggests both prehistoric origins and later remodelling of the earthwork.

I hope the re-publication of my paper on Wansdyke, even without revision to include the above publications or any more recent relevant work, is accepted as a welcome step to make the article more easily accessible to support future research.

Preamble to the original 2009 publication

In the last volume of this journal I presented a paper examining the origin and design of the linear earthworks of the Welsh Marches: in particular Offa's Dyke (in its various manifestations) and Wat's Dyke (Malim 2007). During that study, the name Wansdyke was often encountered, and, although not relevant to a study of the boundary dykes within the Welsh Marches, it became clear that the Wansdyke monuments were of great similarity in concept and design to those along the Marches. This volume provides an opportunity to compare and contrast Wansdyke with a range of other linear monuments as defensive structures, territorial boundaries, and barriers to control routeways. The previous paper started with the fact that it was over fifty years since Fox's seminal publication on the linear earthworks of the Welsh Marches (Fox 1955), and that it was time for a review of his survey and conclusions in the light of fresh investigation. This paper can start from a similar point, in that it is both fifty years since Aileen Fox's and Cyril Fox's survey and study of Wansdyke (Fox and Fox 1959) in which they reviewed previous fieldwork and presented fresh interpretation, and O.G.S. Crawford's (1953) publication *Archaeology in the Field* which included linear earthworks and an appendix devoted to Wansdyke. Since then there have been a number of substantial investigations of Wansdyke and other linear monuments such as Grim's Ditch, and thus time is due for a synthesis and reassessment.

Introduction

The enigmatic monument known as the Wansdyke (West and East) has been subject to detailed study by eminent archaeologists such as Pitt Rivers, Crawford and the

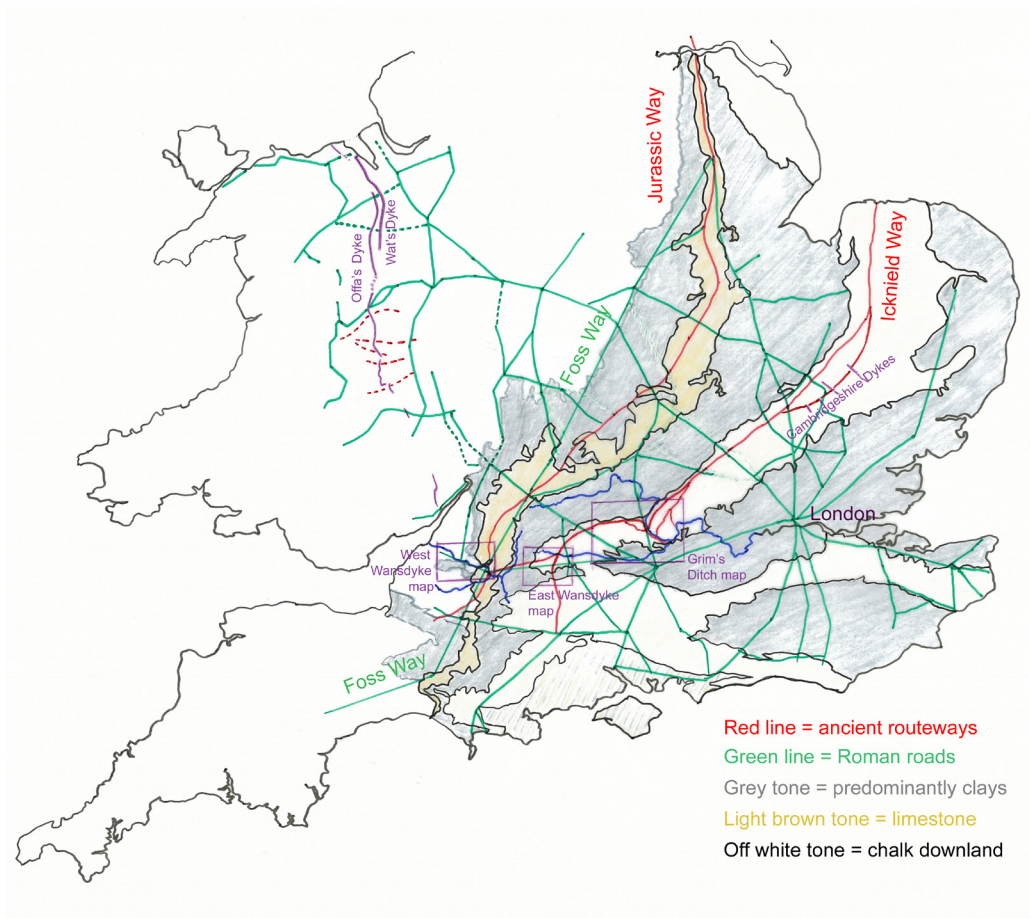


Figure 1: General location map showing predominant geological formations, ancient highways and locations of dykes and ditches as discussed in text (based on the Geological Survey of Britain 5th ed. 1969 25 miles: 1" scale; OS Roman Britain 5th ed. 2001; Grimes 1951)

Foxes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their surveys have helped establish a corpus of information supplemented by other investigations, which have formed a foundation for much constructive debate in recent years, so much so that there is now a web-site dedicated to Wansdyke and like-minded studies.¹ The relationship between the various parts of Wansdyke with estate boundaries and major routeways, their presence in charters and significance to battles, and the dating of them as short-lived strategic structures associated with specific historical events, has been the main focus for interpretation. Their similarity or difference with other linear monuments that are located either within the bounds or adjacent to the Wessex heartland, and also with those much further away, is a more ambitious and wide-ranging research project yet to be undertaken. This article is a preliminary step in assembling and analysing available

¹ <http://www.wansdyke21.org.uk/wansdykehomepage.htm>

data to look at these monuments in order to assess whether they were a product of local circumstance, regional co-operation, or state-inspired endeavour.

Wansdyke as a name derives from its association with Woden (ON: Odin), the supreme god of the Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythology (Gover *et al.* 1939). Large earthworks often lose remembrance as to their origins, who built them and why, and so become known as the Devil's work, such as Devil's Dyke, or Grim's Ditch. East of the eastern part of Wansdyke lie other linear earthworks, in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Wiltshire, each known as Grim's Ditch, and common to both sets of monuments is the fact that they intersect some of the great thoroughfares of ancient times, the Icknield Way and Ridgeway routes following the limestone and chalk upland that runs in a south-west–north-east orientation through southern and central Britain.

Geological and topographic background

A look at a geological map for the area west–east across England from the Avon Gorge at Bristol to the Wash shows a series of rock formations with a broad orientation south-west–north-east. Oolitic Limestone and Cornbrash laid down in the Jurassic runs in a band from Crewkerne and Yeovil in Somerset, via Bath and the Cotswolds, through north Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Lincolnshire to the Humber (Figure 1). West of this lies the Lias clay formation, and east of the limestone lies the clay belt (Jurassic Oxford and Kimmeridge Clay) that replicates the alignment of the limestone plateau, stretching from east of Yeovil, through Chippenham and Oxford, to Milton Keynes, Huntingdon and the Fens. Further east, the land rises again following the Chalk and Greensand formations of Cretaceous age, which stretch from the coast in Dorset through Salisbury Plain and along the Chilterns, to south Cambridgeshire, Newmarket and the central uplands of Suffolk and Norfolk.

Communications: the ancient routes to the south-west

These geological formations and topographic relief laid the foundations for the way in which people would tend to access and move through different regions. Use could be made of the dry upland routes to travel away from centres of settlement and rich agricultural lands which might have cause for impediment to movement, especially if droving stock. On the other hand, the lowland routes along river valleys and the clay lands between the Limestone and Chalk hills would have provided good summer paths with access to water, and often would have permitted fast travel via boat along a network of water-courses that were once navigable, certainly at the western and eastern sides of the country.

By the late Anglo-Saxon period, there were four principal roads in the united English kingdom granted special royal protection: the Fosse Way, Watling Street, Ermine Street and the Icknield Way (Beldam 1868: 23). Watling Street ran east–west from

London through Wall to Wroxeter and on to Wales, and Ermine Street was the Great North Road from London to Lincoln and on to York; but it is not these roads that concern this article. The Fosse Way and the Icknield Way, however, are pivotal to the focus of the present study.

The Jurassic Way was largely a ridgeway route that followed the Limestone belt from Lincoln to Bath and beyond 'the junction of the Lias and the Oolite' (Grimes 1951: 144). In essence, it runs along those parts of high land that formed watersheds for major river valleys, as between the Welland and the Nene, and the Avon and the Thames, passing Banbury and Rollright, through Stow on the Wold and Cirencester, Old Sodbury and Bath, on its way to Wells and Glastonbury. The Roman Fosse Way replicated much of the more ancient Jurassic Way with a more formal and direct road.

The Icknield Way was the major route that connected the Severn Estuary to East Anglia and the Wash, following the chalk escarpment. In the west this route is better known as The Ridgeway. Within the Icknield Way zone, there are several routes including turn-offs to service areas to the south as it proceeded on its main direction south-westwards; as described by Beldam it 'commenced on the Norfolk coast, ... passed through the country of the Iceni, ... to Royston, where it was crossed by the Erming Street... (then) Dunstable near to which it was crossed by the Watling Street; from thence it continued to follow the great chain of chalk hills which traverse the country in a south-westerly direction, throwing out parallel lines at different stages of its course; and, here and there, being checked or defended ... by dykes and fortified camps' (Beldam 1868: 24).

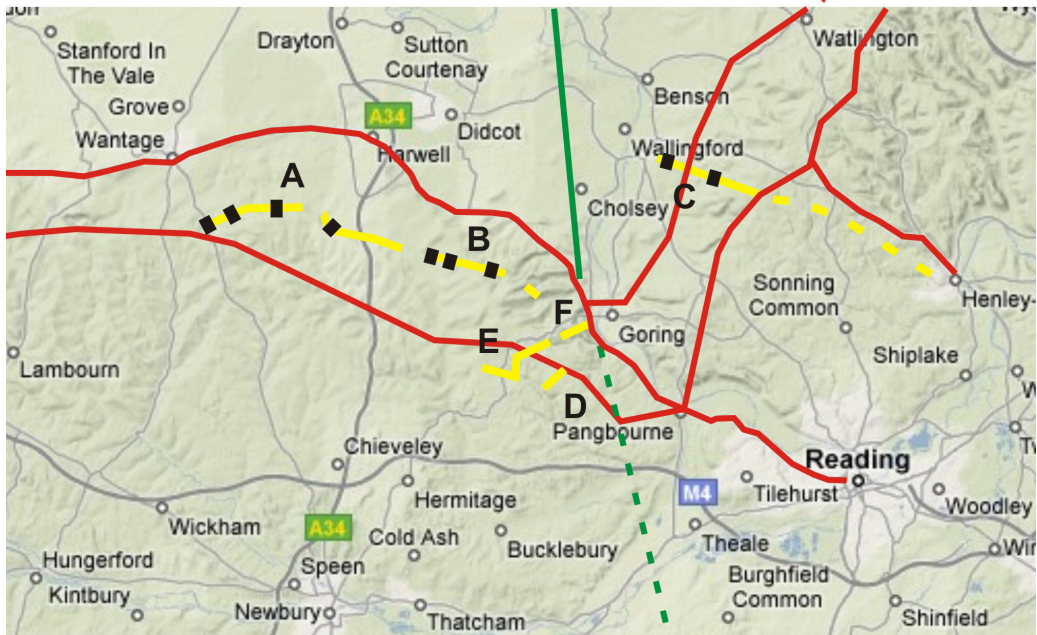
It was these ancient routes, the Icknield, Ridgeway and Foss, that served Anglo-Saxon and later Danish armies as they advanced westwards into the country. Crawford refers to documentary sources that record the Wiltshire Ridgeway also as the *herepath* (OE), a name also used in a charter dated AD 963 for a route through West Wansdyke (Crawford 1953: 253, 258). This name is Old English and implies a route along which armies could have moved.

Location, characteristics and names of linear monuments

Grim's Ditch

Grim's Ditch is the name given to a linear feature found in both South and North Oxfordshire (as well as elsewhere), but the two are separate monuments. The southern monument is a discontinuous bank and ditch that winds along the dip slope of the northern edge of the Chalk escarpment between Ardington Down, 4km south-east of Wantage, and Moulsoford (Figure 2). Grim's Ditch from Ardington to Aston Upthorpe Down has a ditch to the south and a bank on the north side, ranging in altitude from 200m–150m AOD. Although a discontinuous line is now visible, investigations and cropmark evidence have shown that a ditch can be found connecting sections of the

Grim's Ditch



A. Ardington Down, B. Aston Upthorpe Down, C. Mongewell, D. Ashampstead, E. Aldworth, F. Streatley. ■ = Excavations.

Figure 2: Grim's Ditch in South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire: topographic and geographical location (based on Google Maps 2009 Tele atlas terrain)

surviving earthwork, strongly suggesting that the monument was envisaged and constructed as a continuous linear feature well below the crest of the hill (Oxfordshire HER) and following the grain of the landscape. Parish boundaries follow this monument and it is noteworthy that the current county boundary between Oxfordshire and Berkshire follows the twists and straight sections of Grim's Ditch within this section of the monument. Although a product of local government reform in 1974, it remains a statement to the significance of the monument, geographically, topographically and structurally, that it was chosen in modern times (because of its historical connection with parish boundaries) to form part of a new administrative boundary: i.e. Grim's Ditch has presence in the landscape even now (Figure 3). There is a gap in the line of the monument as the land drops eastwards to the Thames at Moulsoford, but two lengths of earthwork called Devil's Ditch along the Moulsoford Downs could form an extended part of the monument. Field observation of Grim's Ditch within this downland landscape shows that it runs roughly parallel to the north of the Ridgeway, and is positioned two-thirds of the way down-slope from it to the north (Figure 4). With a ditch to the south



Figure 3: Aston Upthorpe Grim's Ditch looking west



Figure 4: View from the Ridgeway at Aston Upthorpe Down looking north to Didcot and Thames valley. Grim's Ditch runs parallel downslope from this location



Figure 5: Mongewell Grim's Ditch looking north-east

and a bank thrown up on the downhill part, it seems that Grim's Ditch would have been tactically unsound as a defensive feature, and so its purpose must have been as a socio-political boundary.

Five kilometres further north lies Wallingford, a Saxon *burh* and important crossing point for the Thames. Across the river from here, at Mongewell Park, a long straight section runs 5.5km eastwards with evidence of continuation from earthworks at Hayden Farm and Highmoor Trench, ranging in altitude from c. 90m–125m AOD. The ditch lies to the north and a substantial bank has been formed of chalk to the south (Figure 5). From thirteenth-century documentary sources recording a Grim's Ditch running in from the west and along New Street to join the Thames again at Henley, the total length of this monument would have effectively defined an undulating territory of chalkland to the south contained within a loop of the Thames. Both the Icknield Way and Chiltern Ridgeway run north-east-south-west through the straight stretch of this monument, so that the Icknield Way crossed the Thames to the south of South Stoke and Moulsoford, at Goring and Streatley, and the Ridgeway crossed at Whitchurch-Pangbourne (Crawford 1931: map, 1953: 185) (Figure 6). The Berkshire Ridgeway then runs parallel to the south of Grim's Ditch at Upthorpe Down and Ardington, as it progresses westwards through the Chilton Downs with wide-ranging views over the Thames Valley to the north.



Figure 6: Grim's Ditch in Berkshire and the Chilterns (from Crawford 1931) (see also Bell's Figure 1, this volume)

Other earthworks also called Grim's Ditch are found on the west side of the Thames, north-west of Reading, but these appear discrete linear monuments with local functions such as to command and control access south-eastwards along the Roman road from Dorchester on Thames to Reading (Crawford 1931). Examination of 1:50,000 OS mapping for the area and reference to the Historic Environment Record for West Berkshire show these as comprising one section that heads west for 1km from the Thames south of Streatley, with the eastern end forming the parish boundary between Streatley and Basildon; there is then a gap of 2km before a second stretch is visible for 2km to the south of Aldworth. A third section of these Grim's Ditches can be seen 1.5km south, to the east of Ashampstead, and was probably located to control one of the Ridgeway routes (Crawford 1931) that is now followed by the road from Aldworth to Upper Basildon. These monuments appear to cross the grain of the landscape rather than follow conspicuous topographical features, with the western parts at c. 130–140m AOD, and Streatley dropping from 80m–50m AOD. They have been surveyed in 2003–2004 as part of a monument management programme by West Berkshire Heritage Service

and these surveys have added considerable detail to description of the existing visible monuments; multiple banks and ditches have been plotted in Foxborough Wood, Aldford, which explains why the bank and ditch have been observed facing in different directions by different people (Greenaway and Woodage 2003, 2004).

When examined on the ground by the author, the southern part, at Ashampstead, had a slight bank with a ditch to north that was exaggerated by a drop in ground level as it sloped to the north. This was to the west of the present road, and on the east side no trace of an earthwork could be found, but instead a wet area was seen in scrub. The Aldworth section on both sides of the road at De la Beche Farm showed a chalk-built bank on the north side of a substantial ditch (Figure 7) (apparently contrary to Crawford's description (1931: 162), but note also Greenaway's and Woodage's survey of multiple banks and ditches for this section which might account for confusion) and a wet area lay to the west of the road. Within the woodland further east, where Grim's Ditch is found on either side of the Aldworth–Basildon road, the ditch appears to swap sides; to the west the ditch is to the south with low bank to north (in continuation of the section from De la Beche Farm), but on the east side of the road a substantial bank exists with a deep and wide ditch to the north (Figure 8). In this area woodland banks can also be seen as lesser features running beside the road, but there is also another substantial bank and ditch of similar proportions to Grim's Ditch, that runs south, with the ditch to the east; this diverges from the woodland bank about 100m south of its juncture with Grim's Ditch (Figure 9). Chalk and flint nodules were visible as part of the composition of this southern extension to Grim's Ditch. Crawford also noted this southern arm to Grim's Ditch (in Foxborough Copse) and he described the Aldworth–Basildon road as the 'Ridgeway coming from Hungerford Green' (Crawford 1931: 162).

The Streatley section was observed by the author at both its western and eastern ends, at Stichens Green (west) and beside the road from Goring to Pangbourne (A329) (east), where it rises steeply westwards with a ditch to the north. At the west end a massive ditch was found on the north side with a large bank of flint and chalk to the south, hidden amidst many yews and other trees, whereas at the east end a smaller bank and ditch was observed on a very steep descent towards the Thames (Figures 10 and 11); this is argued to have been erected to control access south along the Dorchester–Silchester Roman road (Crawford 1953: 185). From my observations, however, it was evident that the west end was constructed half-way down a steep slope southwards, and thereby would seemingly have had no defensive advantage, as the ditch cut into higher land to the north.

The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch is not connected with the other parts, except by name (Crawford 1930). It is the name given to a series of ditch and bank features near to Charlbury, extending into Ditchley and Blenheim Parks north of Woodstock (Figure 12a). It would appear from examination of OS mapping that these features seem, in part, to be located in order to control passage along Roman Akeman Street on its way west to Cirencester, and partly they seem to be defining the boundary of a territory, perhaps



Figure 7: Aldworth Grim's Ditch: chalk bank and ditch looking west (east side of road at De la Beche Farm)



Figure 8: Aldworth Grim's Ditch: bank and ditch looking west (east side of road at Foxborough Copse)



Figure 9: Aldworth Grim's Ditch: southern extension bank and ditch looking south

Figure 10: Streatley Grim's Ditch: chalk and flint bank and ditch in yew trees looking east (at Ash Hill)



Figure 11: Streatley Grim's Ditch: western terminal at dry valley and junction of roads (at Ash Hill)

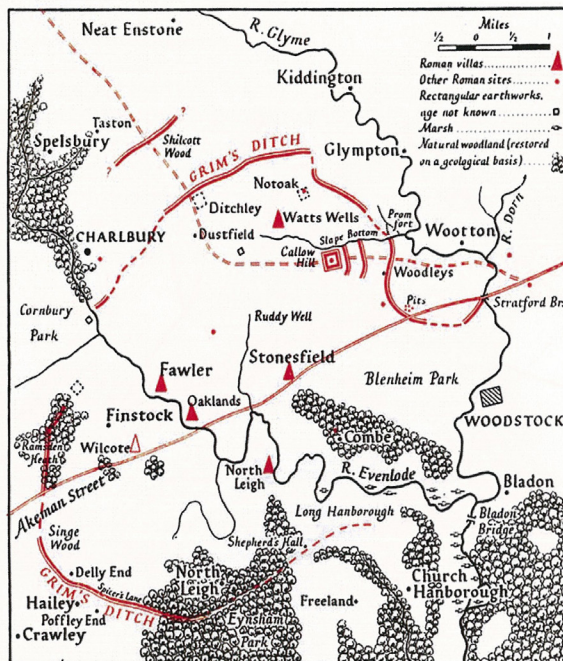


FIG. 1. THE WYCHWOOD DISTRICT, SHOWING COURSE OF GRIM'S DITCH

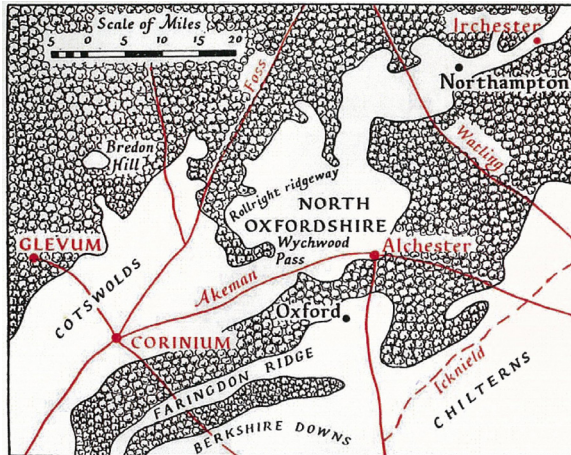


Figure 12: North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch a) detailed location b) Roman roads and woodland (from Crawford 1930)

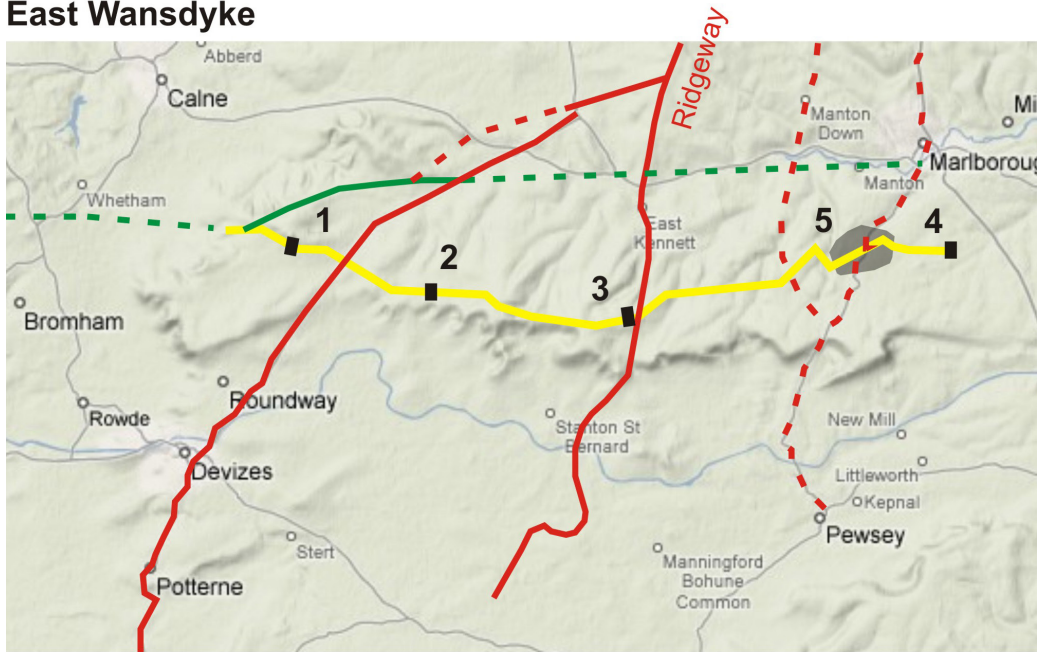
an estate (Figure 12b). This monument is not discussed further in this article, but a recent study of it can be found in Massey (1999).

Wansdyke

Wansdyke is divided into two parts, known as East and West Wansdyke. East Wansdyke extends for 11 miles (c. 18km) from Morgan's Hill at 260m AOD (4km south-east of Calne) to Savernake Forest at 190m AOD (south of Marlborough) (Figure 13), following the north-facing crest of the Chalk escarpment and the Avon–Stour and the Thames–Kennet valley watersheds (Fox and Fox 1959: 1). Crawford's description provides an atmospheric summary 'This is by far the finest section of the whole earthwork. It runs along the back of the downs behind the Vale of Pewsey escarpment in almost undiminished magnificence ... there could be no better beginning for a field archaeologist than to walk along Wansdyke from Morgan's Hill to near Marlborough no finer downland in the whole of England, though no doubt it is

doomed, like the rest, to be turned into arable' (Crawford 1953: 254). This was an area he knew well, having explored it as an errant schoolboy to escape from more mundane activities at Marlborough College! This section of Wansdyke consists of an impressive bank and ditch rampart with the ditch on the northern side (Figures 14 and 15). It is

East Wansdyke



Excavations by:

1. Pitt Rivers 1889, 2. Pitt Rivers 1890, 3+4. Green 1970, 5. Fowler 1999

Figure 13: East Wansdyke: topographic and geographical location (based on Google Maps 2009 Tele atlas terrain)



Figure 14: East Wansdyke on Morgan's Hill with view west to the lowlands



Figure 15: East Wansdyke at Shepherds Shore crossing the Devizes–Avebury road looking east

crossed by several arms of the Ridgeway, including a main southern route along Hackpen Hill through Overton and East Kennet to Alton Barnes and Woodborough; at its western end it meets the western end of the route that heads westwards from Hackpen Hill via Avebury, continuing as the Roman road known as *Verlucio* (Sandy Lane) to Bath (now a holloway Figure 16), which had its origins at *Cunetio* (Mildenhall, Marlborough). A visit to the sections of Wansdyke at Morgan's Hill and the Devizes road brought home to the author the massive nature of the construction employed and the careful siting of the earthwork to utilise the topography of the ground to exaggerate the scale of the dyke; commanding views to north and south, west and east, are provided by Wansdyke's location on Morgan's Hill. A number of sections have been excavated through it over the past century or so.

West Wansdyke runs for 10.5 miles (c. 20km) from Maes Knoll hillfort overlooking and running parallel to the Avon valley at Bristol on its route to Horsecombe at Odd Down, South Stoke, where it connects to a southward turn in the River Avon (Figure 17). It consists of a bank and ditch, with the ditch on the north side; its route runs through two hillforts (Maes Knoll, Stantonbury). The geological formation is varied, and the Dyke rises and falls between 30–300m AOD as it traverses Oolitic hills and small river valleys for tributaries draining north to the Avon. Although occasional stretches run along

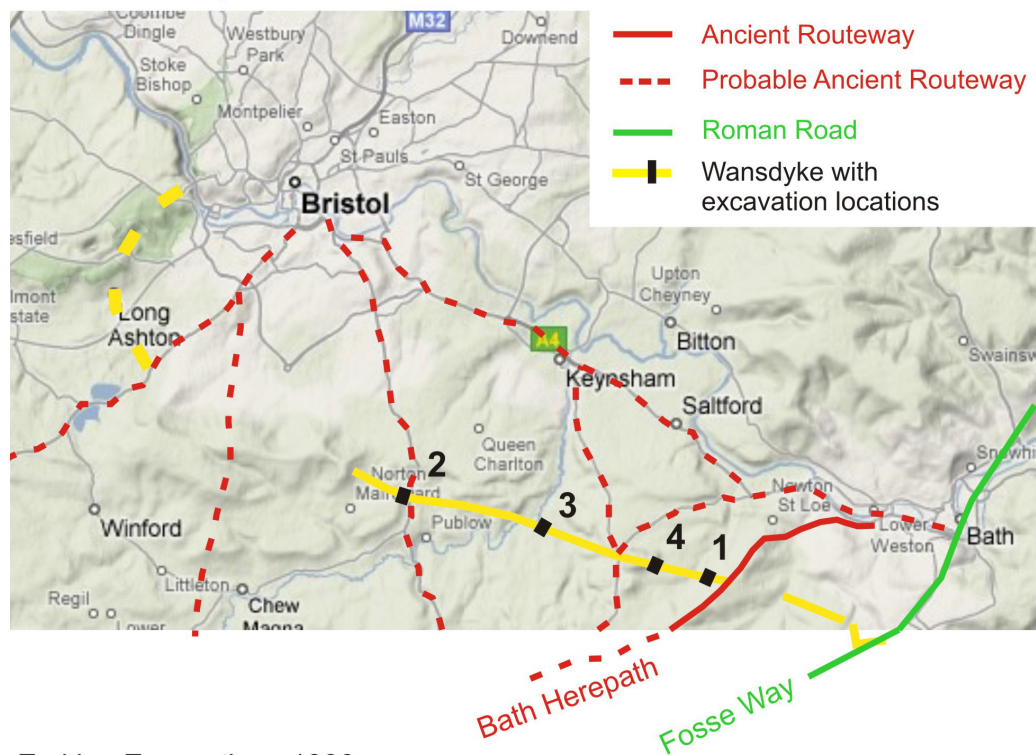


Figure 16: Roman road to Verlucio as Holloway at western end of East Wansdyke, looking west

existing roads, most lines of communication appear to be cut by the monument, including the Bath *herepath* (Crawford 1953: 253) and the Fosse Way at its eastern end. In essence it runs against the grain of the landscape, and a field visit by the author emphasised how the monument did not have long views or commanding locations, although where the earthwork survived the dyke was of substantial proportions (Figures 18 and 19).

It has also been suggested that the monument continued to the west, from the heights of Dundry down a steep descent at Highridge Common to Yanley Lane, and from there via Aston Court to Stokeleigh Camp/Burwalls on the southern edge of the Avon Gorge (Gardiner 1998 (this line has been dashed on Figure 17)). Antiquarian fieldwork had reported lengths of linear embankment, local place-name evidence which connected Yanley Lane with Wansditch, and documentary evidence from the Ashton Court estate that contained fourteenth-century land deeds referring to 'Wondesdich Lane'. Gardiner's argument was that it would have made poor military sense to leave Ashton Vale unprotected, allowing easy access to high-status sites further south, and that the whole of West Wansdyke might have been the product of a polity based at Cadbury (Congresbury) – 'Cad Cong' – a northern bastion of the Dumnonii.

West Wansdyke



Erskine Excavations 1990s

1. Park Farm 2. Blackrock Lane 3. Compton Green 4. Binces Lane

Figure 17: West Wansdyke: topographic and geographical location (based on Google Maps 2009 Tele atlas terrain)

Physical description from survey and excavation

Several excavations have been conducted through Grim's Ditch and East Wansdyke in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as part of both research excavations and works associated with pipeline construction. West Wansdyke was the subject of an integrated research programme using documentary study, field survey, geophysical survey and excavation by the Avon Archaeological Unit during the 1990s. Comparative data from excavation though all these monuments is presented in Tables 1–3.

Grim's Ditch

Along the Chiltern section of Grim's Ditch several excavations have taken place in recent times, some as part of research investigations, but many because of pipelines.

Table 1: Grim's Ditch excavations

Location	Bank Details				Ditch Details				Other Details				
	Material	Width	Height	Revetment	Berm	Shape	Width	Depth	Fill phases	Counter scarp	Dating	Excavator	Notes
Mongewell		9.1	2	No			7.3					1959 Oxoniensis 24	
Mongewell SU617879		5	0.7	No	No			2.1			1A pot	Hinchliffe 1965	3 inhumations in bank; 1 burial S of ditch
Site C40	Chalk Rubble	10	1.75	No		V	3	>1.5	Powered chalk			Southern Feeder gas PL 1984 p. 44	V-shaped ditch 6m to S 2.1 x 1m
Ginge Down E			1.5–1.8			On south side		1.2			BA pot	1984 Oxoniensis 48	Posthole beneath bank
Tile Barn, Ginge Down			1				9				1A, RB & Saxon pot		
Chilton Plantation W							4.5–6				BA pot adjacent	Ford 1982	Bank = hedgeline; Ridgeway in proximity
Betterton Down			12			On south side	10	0.9–1.2			RB pot adjacent	Ford 1982	
Aston Upthorpe Down Site C33						U on south side	3.2	1.16	2 phases chalk rubble, clay w/ flints		BA pot; RB pot	Ford 1982; southern Feeder gas PL 1984 p.50, Network Archaeology 2006	Recut ditch
Churn Gallops Deans Bottom 3 trenches											EBA 8 th –5 th C BC pot	Ford 1982	Ditch aligned on Long Barrow; Celtic field system incorporates Grim Ditch

Table 2: East Wansdyke excavations

Location	Bank Details				Ditch Details				Other Details				
	Material	Width	Height	Revetment	Berm	Shape	Width	Depth	Fill phases	Counter scarp	Dating	Excavator	Notes
Red Shore SU117648	Clay w/ flints	9.5	2	No	slight	V	10	3.9	3 phases	Yes	Cuts Celtic fields and estate boundaries; 1 st C AD pot	H. S. Green 1966–70 (Green 1971)	Intersection with Ridgeway; buried soil, pollen pastureland
New Buildings SU193665	clay										Follows prior estate boundaries; Samian 1 st C AD; Savername ware late 1stC AD; RB pot; iron penannular brooch	H. S. Green 1966–70 (Green 1971)	Buried soil; pollen, woodland in vicinity
Shepherd's Shore Section 1		10	2.28	No	No	U	10	3.9	3 phases	Yes	600 Roman coins, RB pot, knife, nails	Pitt Rivers 1888 (Pitt Rivers 1892)	Old Ground Surface
Brown's Barn Section 2		9	2.13	No	No	U with slot	10	3.9	3 phases	Yes	Prehistoric & RB pot, sandile clear, nails	Pitt Rivers 1890–91 (Pitt Rivers 1892)	Old Ground Surface; earlier enclosure respected by Wansdyke

Table 3: West Wansdyke excavations

Location	Bank Details				Ditch Details			Other Details					
	Material	Width	Height	Revetment	Berm	Shape	Width	Depth	Fill phases	Counter Scarp	Dating	Excavator	Notes
Binces Lane East, Stanton Prior ST686637	Limestone and stony soils	12.5	Ploughed	No	No	U	3.5	1.7	3 phases, primary silt, rubble, mixed deposit with revetment stones	Yes	Prehistoric & RB pot	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	Terminal, entrance through dyke
Binces Lane West	Stony material	c. 5m	Ploughed	No	No	U with trench at base	6	2.4	Primary rubble from revetment stones		Cl4 of BA bone tool; worked flint, RB pot	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	Palisade trench to rear of bank
Compton Green, Compton Dando, ST652646	Clay marl & imported yellow clay	13	0.8	Yes	Yes	V	5.8	2.8	3 phases	Yes	Prehistoric pot and flint flakes	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	2 phases of bank construction
Blackrock Lane, Publow ST620653	Complex sequence of clays and sandstone 3 layers of silty-clay	12.5	1.7	Yes	Yes	V with trench at base	4.8	2.7	Broad sequence of natural fills		Cl4 of oak charcoal in buried soil early 1 st millennium BC; flint tools & flakes	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	3 phases of construction, 2 stabilization layers; cultivated land, later scrub regeneration
Park Farm, Newton St. Loc ST698633	Small stones	10	0.4	No	Yes	V	5.5	2.4	3 phases	Yes	None	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	
Fairy Hill, Compton Dando	Multi-phase	12.5-14			Yes		6.5		Stones		RB pot	J. Erskine 1990s (Erskine 2007)	



Figure 18: West Wansdyke bank at Blackrock looking east



Figure 19: West Wansdyke and Fosse Way intersection looking north

At Ginge Down, Ardington, the bank stands up to 1.8m in height and the ditch is 6 m wide; it was excavated in 1982 and had a post-hole beneath the bank (Oxfordshire HER12093). At Churn Gallops on Aston Upthorpe Down, excavation of an area without standing remains as part of the Southern Feeder Pipeline revealed a U-shaped ditch with steep sides that had been recut. It was 3.2m wide by 1.16m deep. It contained two deposits which showed distinctly different in-fill episodes: a clay and chalk rubble primary phase, and secondary one consisting of ‘dark clayish loam with flints’ (Oxfordshire HER9113). At Chilton, a section of the monument was excavated and recorded a ditch 4.5–6m in width (Oxfordshire HER7741), whereas at Betterton Down, Lockinge, two sections were excavated revealing a ditch 3m wide by 0.9–1.2m deep, and a bank 1.2m high (Oxfordshire HER7739, 12091).

At Mongewell Park, various investigations have been recorded, in 1907 as well as in the 1970s for road widening and pipelines. The bank was recorded as having been 9.1m wide and the ditch 7.3m wide; a length of bank surviving to 2m in height was also found (Oxfordshire HER8900). Hinchliffe suggests a berm with a possible timber revetment fronting the bank, and describes the ditch as U-shaped, 2.5–3m deep and 4m wide (Figure 20) with sides at a 50% angle (Hinchliffe 1975); his bank, however, only survived to 0.7m in height and 5m width.

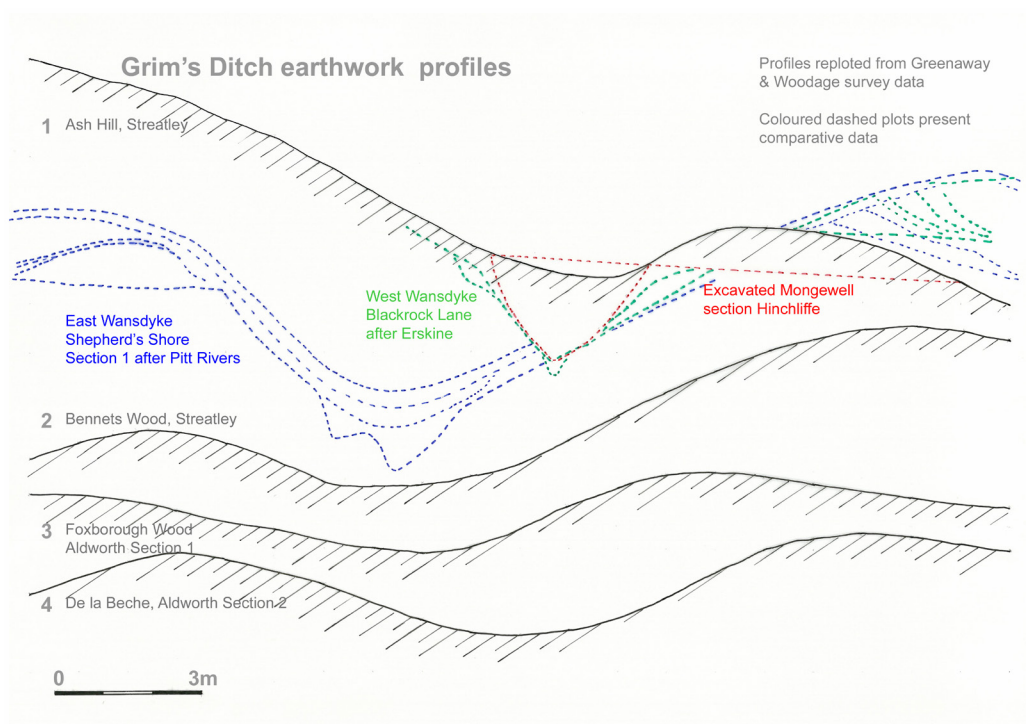


Figure 20: Grim's Ditch and comparative profiles from Wansdyke (after Greenaway and Woodage 2003–2004)

At Mongewell Woods a V-shaped ditch was found on the south side, as well as the ditch to the north of the bank, when cut for a gas pipe in the 1980s. The bank had a core of chalk rubble and its dimensions overall was 10m wide and 1.75m high, with a V-shaped ditch to the north 3m wide and over 1.5m deep, another V-shaped ditch to the south of lesser proportions (2.1m wide x 1m deep) (Oxfordshire HER8900).

At Aldworth, the Grim's Ditch was excavated in c. 1980 as part of investigations of the linear earthworks on the Berkshire Downs by Steve Ford, and a first-century AD date was given to the smaller of two parallel ditches, the second ditch being slightly later based on Roman pottery. The main ditch to the south is described as V-shaped, ranging in size from 0.6–1.2m deep and 8m wide, with a bank 0.7–1.7m high and 3–8m in width. In addition to the dating evidence an unmortared wall of flint nodules was recorded by the Berkshire Field Research Group (RCHME excavations index; West Berkshire HER1482). Monument survey in 2003 showed a multiple ditch and bank system, with ditches to north and south and banks internal, with a c. 15m-wide plateau between the banks (Greenaway and Woodage 2003). This survey also provided profiles for various sections of the Aldworth and Streatley earthworks (Figure 20).

East Wansdyke

East Wansdyke was excavated by Pitt Rivers in 1896, and more recently by H. Stephen Green over several seasons between 1966–1970. Peter Fowler also investigated the dyke through field survey at Boreham and West Woods, Overton, in 1997.

Pitt Rivers excavated at two locations, at Old Shepherds Shore (near to Morgan's Hill and the juncture of the dyke with Roman roads), whilst the main excavation 2 miles to the east included a trench through the monument at what he called Brown's Barn (Pitt Rivers 1892). At both locations, the bank was 10m wide and c. 2.2m high and the ditch was U-shaped (with a possible ankle-breaker in the base), 10m wide and 3.9m deep (Figure 21) with a counter-scarp bank to the north. At these two locations he found Romano-British artefactual evidence to provide a *terminus post quem* for construction. He also established that an earthwork enclosure on the north side of Wansdyke at Brown's Barn pre-dated the monument. Crawford comments that several cross-ridge dykes are also cut by Wansdyke; assuming the cross-ridge dykes are prehistoric, then stratigraphically Wansdyke would be Roman or post-Roman in date (Crawford 1953: 254).

Green excavated at Red Shore, where he confirmed that the Ridgeway runs through the dyke on a causeway that had been left intact (Green 1971). At Red Shore, his results revealed a bank 9.5m wide and surviving to 2m in height, with a V-shaped ditch to the north that was 10m wide and 3.9m deep (Figure 21), and a counter-scarp bank beyond. Green's interpretation was that the bank was constructed with a core of clay with flints, and tips of chalk and flint above, on top of which a layer of turves were placed to provide stabilisation. This suggested a sequence of ditch excavation whereby some material was

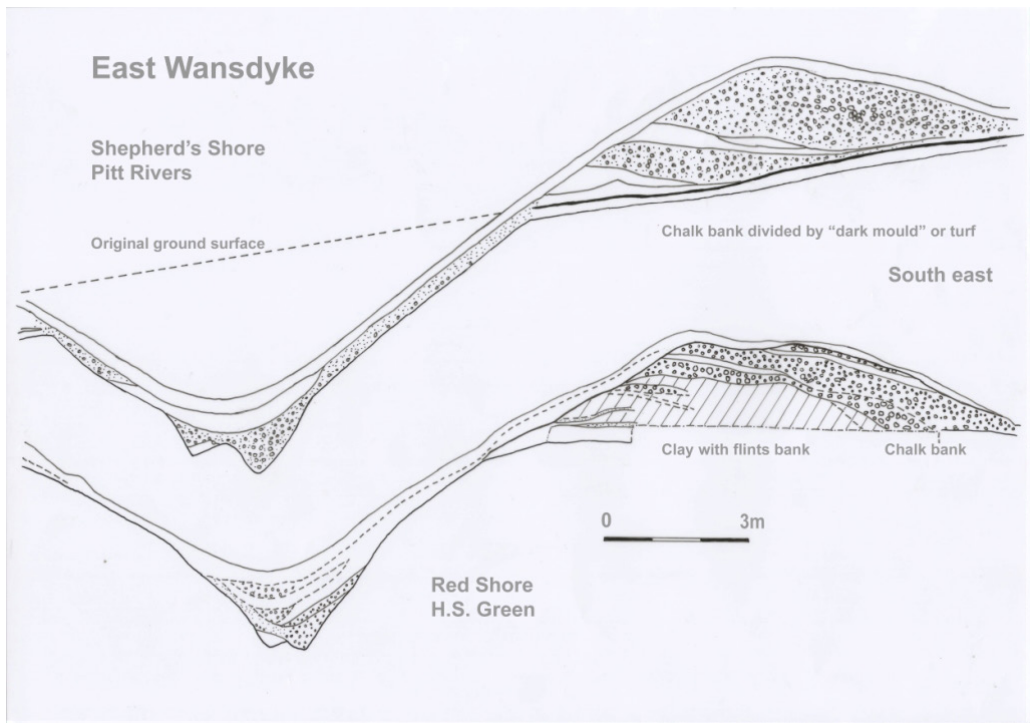


Figure 21: East Wansdyke section drawings (after Pitt Rivers 1892 and Green 1971)

used from directly in front of the bank, whilst other material was used from the ditch further east, to build the bank to the required height, before the turf taken from the original surface of the ditch was laid on top of the bank and sides. He also identified three phases to ditch infill, a primary infill due to weathering, a secondary one with flint nodules topped by soil accumulation and rain-washed material, and a tertiary one also of flint nodules topped by rain-washed silts and soil accumulation. These latter two phases he interpreted as evidence for the short-lived nature of Wansdyke and attributed the deposits to flints encountered during ploughing which were thrown into the ditch. Green also confirmed that the Ridgeway ran along a causeway angled through the dyke, demonstrating that this access point or gateway had been part of the original design.

He also investigated a small part of the monument at New Buildings, west of its terminus on the edge of Savernake Forest. This small investigation at New Buildings only excavated part of the bank, which he found here to consist of clay dumped over a core of re-deposited topsoil. The finds here and at Red Shore were of Romano-British origin, providing a *terminus post quem* for construction.

Fowler's survey was conducted between the two locations excavated by Green and covered a 4.74km woodland section of Wansdyke from Woden's Dene to Clatford Bottom (Fowler 2001). He identifies 10 original openings through Wansdyke and

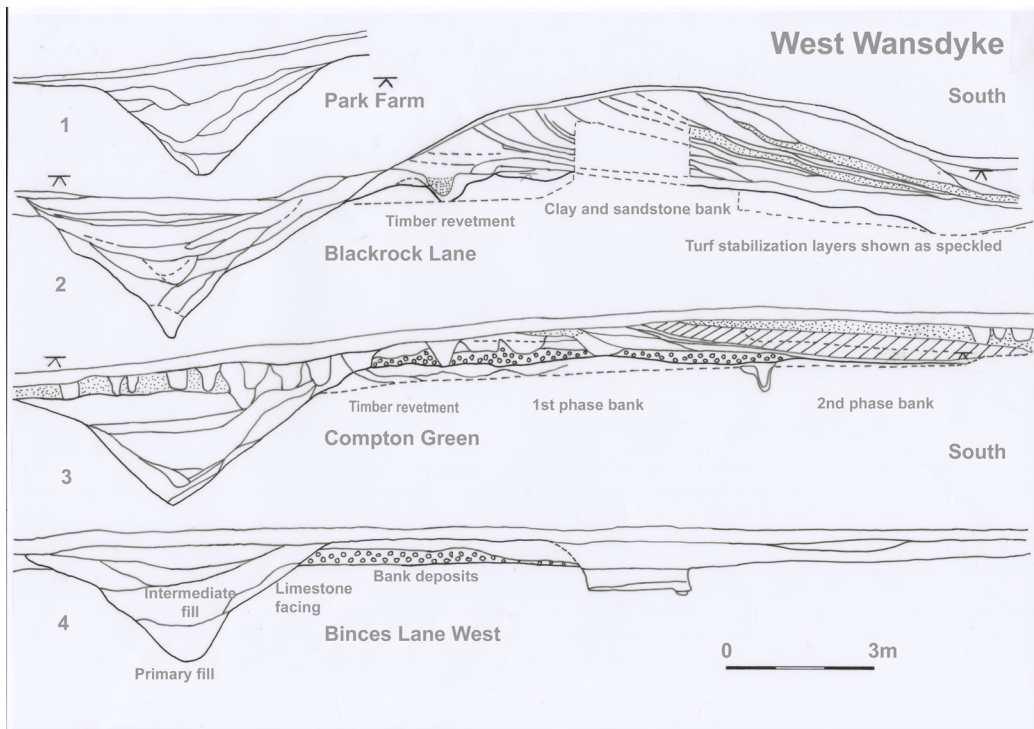


Figure 22: West Wansdyke section drawings (after Erskine 2007)

relates most of these to ancient through routes connecting the Ridgeway with the Vale of Pewsey. The 'gateways' are equidistant at 0.5 Roman miles apart, and the earthwork was constructed by excavation of quarry pits along a marker line, with spoil thrown southwards to form a bank formed of a series of dumps. The final joining up of the pits and then deepening to form a steeply inclined ditch which ran up to the top of the bank, completed the structure. Fowler's interpretation was that this followed a Roman military design akin to Hadrian's Wall, and that the positioning of the dyke made use of local topography and fields of view to provide strategic sense. Fowler also believed that the earthwork was unfinished and presumed this was due to the threat having receded, and therefore a diminished need to continue with the Wansdyke project.

West Wansdyke

Little excavation had taken place at West Wansdyke until the 1990s when a campaign of investigations using field survey, geophysical survey, and excavation was implemented by the Avon Archaeological Unit funded by English Heritage. From 11 excavations, five produced results worthy of publication (Erskine 2007).

Erskine's conclusions were that the ditch and bank were consistent in dimension and technique of construction throughout the length of West Wansdyke, consisting

of a ditch to the north between 5–5.4m wide and c. 2.2m deep (Figure 22). It was of V-shaped design with a trench at the base. A counterscarp bank was discernible at some locations to the north, and to the south a small berm was present in which a palisade trench was constructed at two locations. A revetment of timber is interpreted from this evidence, whereas for other parts of the bank a revetment or facing of stone was used, interpretation based on the evidence of limestone slabs that have fallen as cohesive sections into the ditch. The bank was built of ditch material, limestone and soil dumps some 2–3m in height and up to 10m wide at the base. The sides were angled at 20°, and the technique of construction involved a timber frame or structure to retain the bank material, into which the stone rubble and soil from the ditch was dumped; working was probably from west–east (e.g. at Blackrock: Erskine 2007: 97). The bank consisted of several phases and some sections were complex, whereas the ditch infill sequence was simpler, although also consisting of three phases.

Dating and previous interpretation

Grim's Ditch

Artefactual or scientific dating has not provided a secure date for any of the various sections known as Grim's Ditch. Historical association can be seen from the proximity of the monument to various 9th-century battles, particularly the battle of Ashdown on the 8 January 871, and the location for this battle and that of Reading, would have related to the strategic importance of the Ridgeway and Icknield Way routes. The proximity of the Blowingstone on Blewbury Down, Aston Upthorpe, and its traditional role in summoning warriors was reputedly used by Alfred before the battle of Ashdown (Sullivan 2019: 29).

The Aston Upthorpe Down section has had more than one investigation, but with conflicting results. At Churn, the evidence was strongly in favour of a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date from worked flint and pottery, whilst excavations as part of the Chalgrove–Ilsey pipeline recovered four sherds of Roman greyware from the ditch, and a later recut. Roman pottery was also found during excavations through the ditch at Betterton Down. The Bronze Age date was also attributed to a section excavated at Ginge Down in 1982, but another section at Tile Barn had fragments of Iron Age, Roman and possibly Saxon pottery (Oxfordshire HER).

The Mongewell section was investigated in connection with the Wallingford bypass in 1987–1988. *Aterminus post quem* was given by an Iron Age or Roman field boundary beneath the bank and a *terminus ante quem* was provided by twelfth or thirteenth century pottery found in the ditch fills. This is supported by the documentary record for Henley on Thames which names Grim's Ditch from the thirteenth century (Oxfordshire HER8920, 7720).

The Aldworth–Streatley sections have been dated from pottery found in excavations in early 1980s which gave a late first-century AD *terminus ante quem* to one ditch, and a

slightly later Roman date to a second ditch. The pottery came from the final infill of the ditches, and the dating therefore suggests their construction is of Iron Age, or earlier, origin (West Berkshire HER1468, 1484).

George Lambrick, writing in 1998, suggests that the Grim's Ditches may well be a product of the political situation in the later Iron Age when the area between the Cherwell and the Thames at Wallingford formed the centre to a number of tribal groups. To the east lay the Catuvellauni, to the south were the Atrebates, and on the west the land was Dobunni territory. He describes the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch at Woodstock/Charlbury as defining a territory within this zone, and other enclosed areas were at Abingdon, Big Ring (Cassington/Eynsham), Dyke Hills (Dorchester on Thames), and the territory between the Mongewell–Henley Grim's Ditch within the loop of the Thames south of it. Lambrick notes that Roman rule ended the overt enmity between these tribes, but that in the post-Roman period and Anglo-Saxon times this zone again became a frontier, with early settlement by the *Gewisse* in the fifth and sixth centuries, and Mercian forays by Penda in the seventh century, before the rise of Wessex in the eighth and ninth centuries AD.

East Wansdyke

Roman pottery was found in the bank make-up by Pitt Rivers' excavation at Brown's Barn, Bishop's Cannings, as well as 600 coins (some of fourth-century emperors), a knife and nails (Pitt Rivers 1892). From this he concluded that the construction was post-Roman or late Roman, and that its form was inspired by Roman military design.

Stephen Green also found Roman pottery at both parts of the Wansdyke that he investigated, in addition to an iron penannular brooch (Green 1971). He noted that the western part of West Wansdyke, located in moorland along the chalk escarpment, cut a Celtic field system and earlier estate boundaries which became parish boundaries; with logical deductive reasoning Desmond Bonney (reproduced in Green) suggested that if the Wansdyke had pre-dated them, then the territorial boundaries of estates and parishes, would have been placed along it. As this was not the case (they in fact follow the Roman road from *Cunetio* (Mildenhall) which is blocked by, or meets with, the western end of Wansdyke, and the onward extension of the road to Bath), and is also true of West Wansdyke, he argued that the monument must post-date them.

Green uses Myres' reference to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to suggest that the most appropriate historical date was the late sixth century when the kings of Wessex defended their land against a strong attack from Thames Valley Saxons, and in particular to Ceawlin. Green reckoned that the most plausible date for a temporary military defence such as Wansdyke was the Battle of *Deorham* (Dyrham north of Bath) in 577 when Ceawlin is reputed to have defeated three British kings (Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath). In response, Cerdic constructed a barrier south of the lost lands which acted as the focus for the final battle and Ceawlin's defeat at *Wodnesbeorg* in 592, a location and

name which forms part of the landscape dedicated to Woden, from which Wansdyke has gained its name.

In contrast, the eastern part of East Wansdyke is built on a less massive scale and runs across a wooded tract of clayland; pollen evidence showed that the dyke had been built in open land, but that woodland lay close by (Green 1971: 142). This part of East Wansdyke is interpreted as a political boundary rather than a military obstacle.

Fowler came independently to the conclusions reached by Pitt Rivers and Trelawney Reed: that Wansdyke followed a Roman military design epitomised by Hadrian's Wall (Fowler 2001: 196). He quotes Reed as having believed Wansdyke was a boundary built by Ambrosius around 365 (–390) AD, and certainly within the period 365–515. In contrast, he refers to Andrew Reynold's suggestion that both parts of Wansdyke were a product of a short-lived political boundary agreement between Wessex and Mercia in the eighth or early ninth centuries (Reynolds and Langlands 2006: 37), but dismisses this on the grounds of its pagan name. Fowler's own interpretation is that Wansdyke was built in the mid-490s as a response to the threat of Anglo-Saxon attack along the Ridgeway, and was unfinished due to the resounding British victory at Mount Baden (possibly Liddington Hill 15km north-east of the West Woods section of Wansdyke).

West Wansdyke

There is little definitive dating evidence for West Wansdyke. Erskine's excavation produced few finds in secure stratigraphic contexts, but there were very small sherds of Roman pottery from one bank and one ditch section, providing a *terminus post quem* for the monument in its latest phase. Artefacts from earlier periods were also found, showing that the dyke must have run through a well-populated landscape. Environmental evidence showed that the dyke was constructed through cultivated land in at least two locations, but that scrub woodland may have developed after this event. Erskine suggests a late or sub-Roman origin for West Wansdyke and likens it to the Antonine Wall; he argues that the dimensions of the ditch and physical form follow the criteria set out by Vegetius in *Epitoma Rei Militaris* and also refers to Gildas' mention of a turf wall which was not successful in its purpose; the contention made by Erskine (following Higham) is that Gildas would not have been familiar with Hadrian's Wall, and thus Wansdyke might have been a more probable source for his reference (Erskine 2007: 101–104). The possibility for precursor prehistoric ranch boundary ditches beneath Wansdyke is also made by Erskine.

The Avon and West Wansdyke zone forms a potential frontier region between three tribes: to the north the Dobunni in Gloucestershire and north Somerset, to the east the Durotriges in south-east Somerset and Dorset, and to the south the Dumnonii in west Somerset, Devon and Cornwall (Gardiner 1998). This seems a similar situation to Lambrick's description (noted above) for the Oxfordshire Thames and Grim's Ditch, that this was also a frontier zone between three tribes. Gardiner contends that the

West Wansdyke might therefore have formed a defensive barrier along the heights overlooking the real boundary of the Avon, and have been a product of the Dumnonii, perhaps in the fifth or sixth centuries AD.

Aileen and Cyril Fox saw Wansdyke as a Pagan Saxon monument due to its name *Wodensdic* in late Saxon charters (Fox and Fox 1959: 44–45). Their interpretation of chronology was that East Wansdyke was probably of West Saxon origin, built by Ceawlin of the Gwissae against the middle Thames Saxons after his defeat in AD 584. The Foxs' chronological interpretation for West Wansdyke was that it was 'a West Saxon construction built by King Cynegils on a line imposed by Penda of Mercia after AD 628' (Fox and Fox 1959: 45).

The conclusions from their survey and reconsideration of Wansdyke (Fox and Fox 1959: 44–45) were that West and East Wansdyke were separate monuments, and that the Roman road from *Cunetio* to Bath via *Verlucio* had been wrongly interpreted as part of greater Wansdyke; instead the earthwork was purely the *agger* of the road itself. The name Wansdyke indicated that both parts were Pagan Saxon in origin, and that West Wansdyke was associated with a probable heathen sanctuary and barrow at *Wodnesbeorge*. They saw East Wansdyke as divided into two parts. It was perceived as a military barrier along the chalk downland between Morgan's Hill and Shaw Farm 'byre' to prevent ingress from the Ridgeway to the Pewsey Vale and Salisbury Plain. Meanwhile, the eastern part of East Wansdyke across claylands to Savernake Forest was a territorial boundary located in woodland unsuitable for warfare, and possibly of secondary construction to the western part. West Wansdyke was interpreted as a discontinuous monument with woodland in-filling the gaps, and that the purpose of the earthwork 'was to control traffic and incursions from the Cotswolds and lower Avon valley, proceeding south-west principally by the Fosseway Roman road'.

Discussion

Comparative data are shown in Figures 20–22, 24 and 25, and in Tables 1–3. From this it is quickly apparent that there is a large degree of similarity in design between the monuments described above, the most notable difference being the larger scale of construction for the ditch at East Wansdyke, and its two-pointed basal profile which suggests a recut. In addition a counter-scarp bank existed at both East and West Wansdyke, but is not recorded as such at Grim's Ditch. Most ditch sections in all monuments are V- or U-shaped (as opposed to the distinctive flat base that characterises the Cambridgeshire Dykes (Malim *et al.* 1996). Construction technique for both parts of Wansdyke seems to have involved work gangs digging quarry ditches, throwing the rock material behind them and then stabilising with turf, and sometimes with timber revetment (Green 1971, Fowler 2001 and Erskine 2007).

It has been unfortunate for the present study that I have been unable to source in time section drawings from excavations through Grim's Ditch, but a reconstructed profile

based on Hinchcliff's excavation data is superimposed over the earthwork surveys undertaken by Greenaway and Woodage in Figure 20. Their survey of the Aldworth Grim's Ditches identified some sections constructed as multiple systems of bank and ditch. This phenomenon is more typical (in my experience) of prehistoric boundaries than of Anglo-Saxon ones. The study of the Cambridgeshire Dykes included Mile Ditches, a triple-ditch feature crossing the Icknield Way, of probable Iron Age date as opposed to the more massive surviving dykes further east which were Anglo-Saxon (Malim *et al.* 1996). Bedfordshire evidence also suggests prehistoric dates for such features (Dyer 1961), whilst the dating for the Suffolk and Norfolk dykes/ditches is ambiguous.

Evidence for timber revetments have been found at both the Mongewell Grim's Ditch and along West Wansdyke, but a berm between bank and ditch seems only to have been found at West Wansdyke. Ditch in-fill sequences suggest three phases for both Wansdykes (and possibly re-cuts in the base of East Wansdyke ditch), and at least two discrete phases in bank construction have been identified for West Wansdyke, Compton Down, and three phases for Blackrock Lane if the turf stabilisation layers are valid. This evidence runs contrary to Fowler's interpretation of Wansdyke in West Wood which he saw as 'an unfinished earthwork for a non-event', as it shows that West Wansdyke, and East Wansdyke along the downland ridge, were maintained or reused over a long period of time.

The earliest origin for construction is provided by Bronze Age pottery in connection with the Ardington–Aston Upthorpe Grim's Ditch, and evidence for Iron Age origin to Grim's Ditch (all parts) and West Wansdyke comes from pottery, stratigraphic relationship to field systems, and radiocarbon dates (Table 3). East Wansdyke has convincing evidence for a post-Roman origin due to the large number of artefacts found during excavation. Roman pottery was found from two locations at West Wansdyke in a very abraded condition, suggesting the pottery had been incorporated in cultivated ground and ploughed over a long period of time before construction of the dyke. Arable cultivation was suggested by palaeoenvironmental evidence for Blackrock Lane, West Wansdyke, whilst pastureland surrounded the downland part of East Wansdyke, and wooded conditions were current in the local landscape prior to construction of the eastern end of East Wansdyke (Table 2).

Documentary and place-name evidence show the pagan origin for the naming of the monuments, and that late Anglo-Saxon charters refer to Wansdyke; perhaps surprisingly Grim's Ditch is not mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charters but is found, however, in other medieval documents. Estate boundaries and parish boundaries do not follow many lengths of the monuments, but are found partially using them, especially in relation to the eastern end of East Wansdyke, parts of West Wansdyke, and parts of the Streatley Grim's Ditch. The argument that such administrative boundaries can be used to help date construction (i.e. that the dykes must post-date them if they are not used for those administrative boundaries) has logical reasoning. However, it is inconsistent with evidence elsewhere: for example this line of reasoning would presume unconvincingly



Figure 23: Mongewell Grim's Ditch west of Ridgeway crossing, looking east showing commanding views to north side of monument

that Grim's Ditch must be later than the creation of estate and parish boundaries in the sub-Roman or Anglo-Saxon period. In Cambridgeshire, by analogy, the Roman road of Ermine Street is very selectively used as an administrative boundary, but there is no assumption that those parts of the road that are not used as parish boundaries must date to Anglo-Saxon or later times! Similarly Erskine's presumption that Gildas is more likely to have been familiar with Wansdyke than Hadrian's Wall in his writings, because of his proximity to the south of England, can be countered by the theory he was born in Strathclyde or, in a recent publication, of his potential birthplace in Arclid, northern Cheshire (Breeze 2008); Breeze agrees with Erskine, however, in that Gildas' knowledge of geography is better for southern Britain than the north.

The various parts of Grim's Ditch reviewed above suggest that the name has been generously shared about for unconnected, although superficially similar, monuments. The two largest sections, the Ardington to Aston Upthorpe Down stretch and the Mongewell Grim's Ditch, have ditches facing in opposite directions. The first is sited in a defensibly impossible location with ditch uphill to south, whereas the latter follows the topography and has a commanding bank with ditch to north, with potential defensive capability and clear control over the Ridgeway and routes southwards (Figure 23). In my opinion, the Ardington and Aston Upthorpe Grim's Ditch is a territorial, and

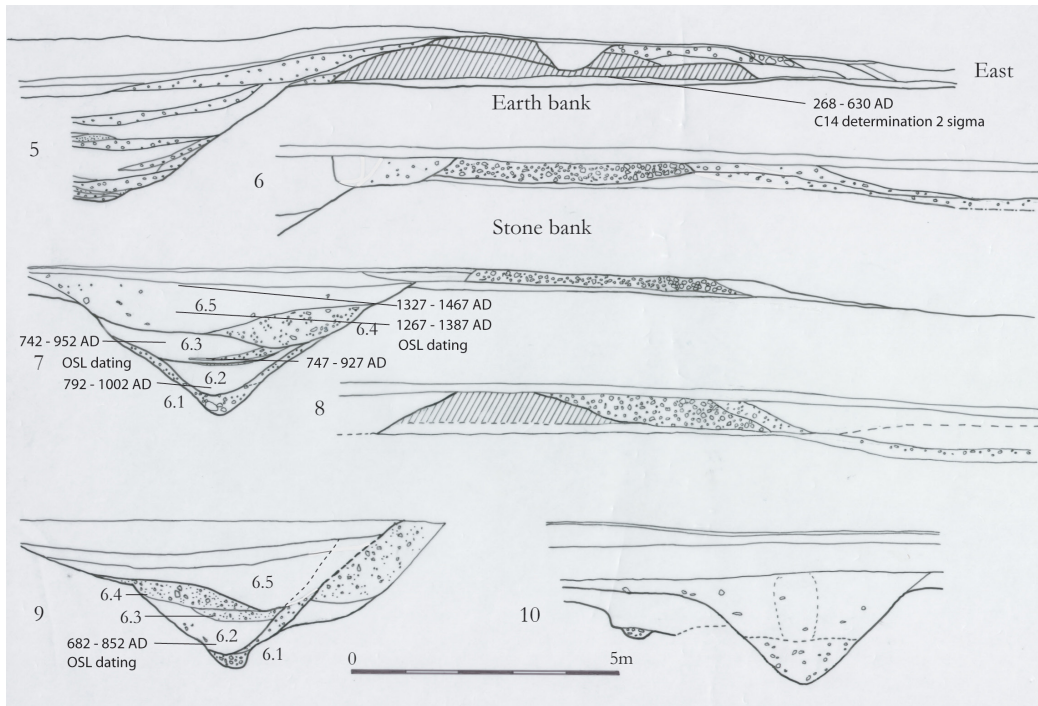


Figure 24: Wat's Dyke section drawings (after Malim and Hayes 2008)

perhaps a political boundary to the north of the Ridgeway that respects the neutrality of the ancient routeway zone, similar to the Chiltern Grim's Ditch (Hamden and Berkhamstead) (Figure 6 and Crawford 1931). Conversely the Mongewell Grim's Ditch is clearly constructed across the Ridgeway/Icknield Way zone, impeding free access along it. This type of barrier is found in many places east of Wallingford, throughout the Icknield Way zone in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Some of these dykes or ditches have been dated or interpreted as prehistoric (e.g. Crawford 1931, Dyer 1961; for the Mile Ditches: Malim *et al.* 1996), and others as Anglo-Saxon.

At Aldworth, Streatley and Ashampstead, the direction in which the banks and ditches face vary, and whether they were, as suggested in the past, built to control access along Roman roads, or built for other purposes such as territorial boundaries (as suggested by the multiple ditch nature of the Foxborough Wood length) remains an area of debate. The place-names of the area have a strong echo of the Anglo-Saxon land use, with tree and woodland-clearing names (-ley) well represented. Current land use shows that woods still cover a good amount of ground, and lanes are narrow, sometimes deep cut, and with woodland banks in evidence. Aldworth, on the other hand, refers to an ancient (important/defended) enclosure, and possibly some of the woodland banks, including parts of Grim's Ditch, are in fact estate boundaries; this would be particularly relevant to the interpretation of the banks at Aldworth, with ditches on opposing sides. The section from Stichen Green to Streatley is similar to the main Grim's Ditch at Aston

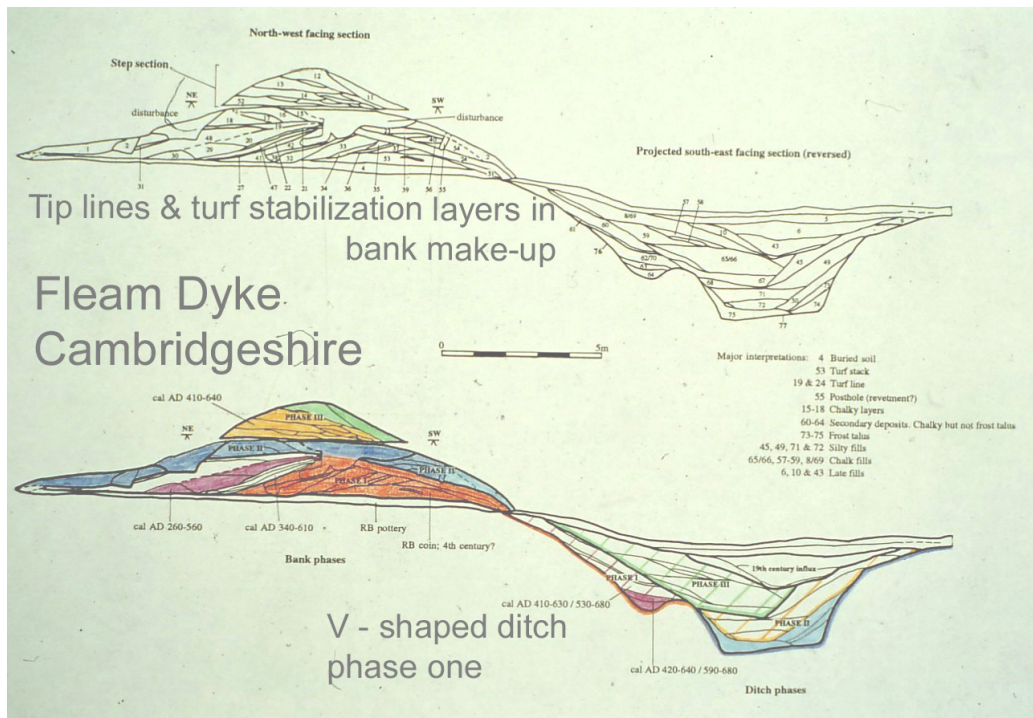


Figure 25: Fleam Dyke section drawing (after Malim *et al.* 1996)

Upthorpe Down, because the ditch and bank, though built in massive form, are sited with the ditch uphill on a steep descent from the north: an ostensibly poor defensive position, and thus more a candidate for a socio-political and territorial boundary.

A counter argument can be presented, however, one that is similar to that suggested by Lethbridge many years ago to explain what he thought might have been the origin of the Cambridgeshire Dykes (Lethbridge 1958; Malim *et al.* 1996: 114). As a physical barrier to horses, and therefore cavalry, the Streatley Wansdyke would have been very effective, especially if the horses were cantering downhill and their riders would see the enemy on the bank, but perhaps not see the ditch until too late to avoid tumbling into it. Dykes as defensive earthworks may be difficult to accept, as they could not have been continuously manned along their entire lengths, but if they are regarded as physical barriers, impediments to horse and wheeled vehicles, then their strategic function can not be doubted. Their physical presence channelled such traffic through a restricted number of causeways or 'gateways'.

East Wansdyke can be seen, by a simple comparison between excavated sections, to have been built on a massive scale, although Erskine's records of West Wansdyke show that it was not much smaller than its namesake further east. The possible ankle-breaker type feature in the base of the ditch can be seen in both of the main East Wansdyke sections, but not in the West Wansdyke sections. This feature is also evident in Wat's

Dyke, but not for example, in the Cambridgeshire Dykes. If the presumption is that this feature is following in Roman military tradition, and hence provides some chronological framework for construction, a fuller analysis of its use on dykes that have widely different dates needs to be explored. In addition, the presence of counter-scarp banks along both parts of Wansdyke, but not Grim's Ditch, requires some further discussion. Counter-scarp banks have not been found in connection with the Cambridgeshire Dykes, nor at Wat's Dyke (Malim and Hayes 2008). They are sometimes found associated with Iron Age defensive enclosures and hillforts, as well as in post-medieval fortifications. Their function has been interpreted as a device to increase exposure of an attacker to a defender's missiles because the enemy would have to rise up over the counter-scarp in full view before he could rush down the ditch and scale the main defensive bank beyond (Hartley 1957: 11). What does this feature imply for dating Wansdyke? Is it an original element integral to the design, and does it suggest active defence of the ramparts, or is it a secondary feature produced from recutting, or clearing out, of the ditch?

Pitt Rivers' entrenchment at Brown's Barn is intriguing. As with the West Wansdyke's Iron Age forts, here the East Wansdyke seems to have linked into, and respected, a former earthwork, though one on a much reduced scale. On this occasion, however, the Wansdyke alters course to connect with the southern part, thus effectively forming a redoubt with the remaining earthwork projecting into alien territory. Why was the northern line of the earthwork not utilised as part of Wansdyke, as this would surely have made more tactical sense? This concept seems similar to what was followed with the forts along West Wansdyke. Pitt Rivers' comments on the dating of the earthwork are also of interest. The trenches he excavated inside it produced no evidence for pitting, and although Roman artefacts were found, there were not any coins; on this basis he states 'that the Entrenchment was not long occupied before it was destroyed by the formation of the Dyke.' The entrenchment was triangular, approximately 168m long by 6.10m at its widest (east) end. The ditch was 3.35m wide and 1.22m deep, and bank was 0.76m high by 3.35m wide approx. It does not appear to be a typical Roman design. Therefore, the assumption can be made that this might have been a camp, either as a precursor to the linear boundary, or possibly as a base for some of the men who constructed Wansdyke. Erskine discusses the need for accommodation for a work force and suggests that the Iron Age forts along West Wansdyke might have provided such camps.

The consistency in design of West Wansdyke as reported by Jonathan Erskine certainly suggests that the existing earthwork was conceived and constructed as a single entity following a template design. The fact that buried sections of West Wansdyke have been detected by geophysical survey and other techniques in some of the gaps between earthwork sections shows that it was a largely continuous monument, that ran up hill and down coombe, linking Iron Age forts en route and linking in to a natural watercourse at its eastern end. The west-east alignment of the monument with ditch to the north, must have been intended to act as a barrier to ingress from the north, and thereby acted

as a control by channelling access through a number of routes such as the Jurassic/Fosse Way (as it progressed uphill along Odd Down from Bath) and the Bath *herepath*. But why is it located back from the line of the Avon? The suggestion has been made that this was because those who built West Wansdyke could not choose the Avon as their frontier, and therefore had to set the barrier further south. Another interpretation, however, could be similar to that for the Ardington–Aston Upthorpe Grim's Ditch, that it defined the edge of a neutral territory, a communication route that was open to all, the Ridgeway. For West Wansdyke this neutral zone for communications could have been the Avon valley.

Erskine's interpretation of its date is based on the finding of Roman pottery, Roman military tradition and parallels, and historical events. He ascribes a fifth-century date to Wansdyke, and convincingly presents writings from sources such as Gildas to illustrate how such turf constructions, and the way they operated, would have been familiar in that period.

This dating is certainly plausible, but there are, as always, different degrees of emphasis that can be put on the various strands of evidence, and other parallels to compare with West Wansdyke. Although Erskine took samples for scientific dating at Blackrock Lane, Publow, these in fact produced Bronze Age and Early Iron Age dates, and thus were interpreted as representing earlier features cut by the monument when it was constructed. Flint flakes were also found in the bank and ditch deposits, but no pottery, and the stratigraphic sequence suggested three phases of construction and two phases of inactivity during periods when turf layers accumulated. If only this section had been cut through West Wansdyke the evidence for a prehistoric date would have been fairly compelling, and indeed it might be that this section of the dyke is Bronze Age in origin. Further credence to a potential prehistoric predecessor to the existing West Wansdyke could be given by its direct relationship connecting Iron Age forts and linking into their defences. The forts demonstrate a previous strategic importance to this zone and the makers of Wansdyke could have re-instated at a later, post-Roman, date. The handful of Roman pottery that has been found in excavation is described as very small, abraded sherds which could not be assigned to any century, or even an early or late Roman date. Their size and state of preservation would argue that they had been in the soil and damaged (through ploughing?) over a long period of time, a line of argument that could be used to support an Anglo-Saxon date for construction.

Comparison to other linear earthworks can also be instructive. The design and dimensions described by Erskine as of Roman military type, are mirrored for another great earthwork, Wat's Dyke, which runs for 65km along the Welsh Marches from the Dee estuary at Basingwerk, Holywell (Flintshire) to the River Morda at St Winifred's Well, Maesbury, Shropshire, where an artificial watercourse probably forms the final length of the monument (Malim and Hayes 2008). This monument is very similar in concept, running from estuary to river, up and down valley sides, and using a series of hillforts as focal points along its length. In addition, the bank and ditch of Wat's

Dyke is of similar proportion and design (with a trench in the base of the ditch in the style of Roman ankle-breaker defences) to the sections published by Erskine for West Wansdyke (Figure 24). Optically Stimulated Luminescence dating of the silts beneath the bank and within the ditch fills of Wat's Dyke, however, demonstrate that it was constructed and used during the early ninth century AD (Malim and Hayes 2008).

At Fleam Dyke in Cambridgeshire, the bank and ditch formed a complex stratigraphic series of deposits, with three or more phases to the bank and turf stabilisation layers on two or three occasions (Malim *et al.* 1996), similar to the interpretation given to West Wansdyke's Blackrock Lane section (compare Figures 22.2 and 25). The first phase ditch at Fleam was V-shaped, but had been largely removed by the massive later Anglo-Saxon ditch. A suite of seven radiocarbon dates from the fill of the first phase ditch and from sealed contexts within the bank deposits were mathematically modelled to provide a refined date-range of construction for the original monument between cal. AD 330 and 510 (92% confidence). Although the various episodes of ditch cutting, cleaning out, and bank dumping carried on until the seventh century, the late Roman and sub-Roman date of the first phase of the surviving Fleam Dyke could perhaps provide a valid comparison to West Wansdyke, albeit the direction in which Fleam faces would argue for the fact that it was built by the migrant Anglo-Saxon settlers against British counter-attack, rather than British defence against other tribes or Anglo-Saxon marauders.

Bill Branson in *Notes from a Small Island* (1995) wrote about the Cambridgeshire Dykes in the following manner: 'Devil's Dyke ... has a kind of menacing, palpably ancient air, but also a feeling of monumental folly. It required an immense commitment of labour to construct, but it didn't take a whole lot of military genius to realise that all an invading army had to do was go around it'. This could apply equally to West and East Wansdyke, and even more obviously to the various entities that are called Grim's Ditch. However, the length of both Wansdykes show that they were conceived as barriers that extended far beyond simple blocks to individual roads, and their terminal points must have had significant reasons for forming the ends to these barriers. Their physical presence across the roads and surrounding countryside would have prevented the movement of horses, stock and wheeled vehicles, except where such ingress was permitted. The eastern ends of West and East Wansdyke were set in a deep river valley (Horsecombe Brook and River Avon) and thick woodland (Savernake Forest) respectively. The western end of East Wansdyke lies at just west of the high point of Morgan's Hill, where it intersects with the Roman road, Ridgeway and Herepath from Marlborough and Avebury to Bath; this must imply that access was encouraged along this route as it descended into the valley to the west, although any movement along it would have been under the control of the Wansdyke guards. The western end of West Wansdyke was at Maes Knoll hillfort after which the land rises to the heights of Dundry with its commanding views over land to north and west towards the Avon gorge and the Severn estuary. Gardiner's hypothesis that there must have been a western extension to Wansdyke that would have protected the coastal lowlands by linking Dundry Heights with the

Avon Gorge at Stokeleigh Camp, Ashton Court, requires hard archaeological evidence: investigations by Cotswold Archaeological Trust which tested this theory in Ashton Court failed to locate any archaeological trace of it (Richard Sermon pers. comm.). Even if this extension had existed, the problem of why a long stretch of undefended land lay between it and Maes Knoll, is not adequately addressed by Gardiner. The ridge from Dundry eastwards is high and overlooks the Avon valley to the north, and perhaps this was sufficient for the purpose of guarding the area. Although at least one route is believed to have run north-south over this ridge (Williams 1992) (and providing the derivation for the Dundry place-name *draeg*) arguably connecting Roman villa sites, limestone and lead mines, with the port at *Abona* (Seamills), possibly the construction of an earthwork was unnecessary because its topographical dominance was enough to provide defensive qualities and presence in the landscape for any approaching enemy. It is perhaps worth noting that the church at Dundry is dedicated to St Michael, the most important Guardian Angel, who is associated with high places, and who protects against enemies from the north, and perhaps this dedication served in the minds of those who built West Wansdyke, as a means of additional defence for this zone.

Mercian and Wessex re-conquest of land occupied by the Danes relied on a policy of military success followed by consolidation and construction of strongholds to act as stops to further incursions by mobile Viking field armies. Their strategy of developing defensive burhs at strategic crossing points of the Thames, places such as Wallingford, allowed the Wessex kings to launch offensive campaigns from behind the security of the political barrier formed by the River Thames. Such strategic thinking could be similar in concept to the idea behind construction of the dykes, defensive banks and ditches from behind which troops could be assembled and then disgorged through access points to carry the attack into enemy-held lands. The relationship with major routes such the Fosse Way, Ridgeway and Icknield Way, allowed the dykes to act not only as control points for long-term trade and inward access (to tax traders and levy charges on the movement of stock), but also as highways along which field armies could be launched to strike rapidly into enemy territory. Such an interpretation offers a fresh slant to understanding the concept and historic circumstance behind construction of these monuments. This scenario would not see them as the consequence of a vulnerable people desperately building a final defence against conquering hordes from the north and east. Instead, it would suggest they were the product of a carefully planned and well-resourced strategic policy that was intended to display the power of the state and to control and tax valid economic activities. These monuments could prevent external mobility and raiding. They could also act offensively as occasion demanded by allowing the assembly of warbands behind the barrier, from when they could be disgorged through gateways along the *herepaths* or ancient routeways across which these earthworks were built.

To advance future research into the origins of these great earthworks it is imperative that we gather well-excavated, stratigraphic sequences through the banks and ditches

that can provide a series of samples for scientific dates from a variety of locations. With this data we can then work in best archaeological tradition from the known to the unknown. With a good series of stratigraphically robust scientific dates and the use of Bayesian modelling, it would then be possible to establish a firm chronology into which the historical context can be fitted, rather than the more uncertain approach that has been followed previously of trying to slot the physical monuments into historical events. It is now time for a fresh campaign of investigation!

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