

Offa's Dyke, Coedpoeth, Wrexham

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 438

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October 2001

Report for Reading Agricultural Consultants

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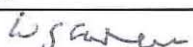
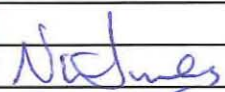
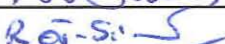
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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2001 the Contracts Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Reading Agricultural Consultants, acting on behalf of Mr R.Tomlinson, to prepare a specification and quotation for undertaking an archaeological watching brief on the scheduled ancient monument of Offa's Dyke, Coedpoeth, Wrexham. The quotation was duly accepted and the watching brief was carried out on the 2nd and 11th October 2001, and this report compiled immediately thereafter.
- 1.2 The site in question lies approximately 2.4km west of Wrexham (SJ 2922 5170; fig. 1).
- 1.3 The work had been requested by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments as a condition of granting Scheduled Monument Consent to undertake groundworks within and adjacent to Offa's Dyke. The scheduled area is 75m long, running beside the unclassified Llewelyn Road as far as the Gwenfro Brook. The dyke itself survives as an earthwork bank, c. 1.5m high, with a ditch along the western side. It had been assumed that the northern tip of this section of dyke had been truncated by recent construction works relating to an access track, and loose rubble had been deposited against the cut end of the monument. Material had also blocked the ditch and caused water to pool within it, threatening the survival of trees which have now become waterlogged.
- 1.4 The current works were intended to stabilise the slopes north of the dyke by moving and regrading the deposited material, including the removal of rubble lying up against the cut end of the dyke, to facilitate landscaping and grassing over of the exposed section. The operations included the installation of a piped drain to alleviate flooding within the currently blocked ditch, as well as works involving tree thinning and removal of dumped rubbish from the scheduled area.

2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1 Rubble consisting mainly of builders' waste was first removed both mechanically and manually from the area immediately to the north and the east of the terminal of the dyke where it was thought to have been truncated. In addition, a proportion of sapling growth was thinned out. The cleaned area revealed the apparent profile of the dyke and, on the eastern side, an area of compacted brownish-yellow silty clay probably represented the surface of the dyke. At this point, removal of the rubble showed the dyke, which was 1.8m high and 5.5m wide, to have a regular profile with no clear evidence that it had been damaged in recent times other than by tree root growth (plates 1 and 2). It was realised that without creating a vertical surface, thus damaging the dyke, it would not be possible to produce a drawn section. Following discussions with Dr Kate Roberts, Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, it was agreed that a measured drawn section could be omitted and that a photographic record would suffice.
- 2.2 It was clear that the natural profile of the area to the east of the dyke terminal had been significantly modified in the past in an attempt to form a trackway from the boundary gate leading to the road to the level ground on the higher ground to the east of the dyke.
- 2.3 During the course of removing rubble from the western side of the trackway and to the east of the ponded ditch, at a point some 5.0m downslope of the dyke terminal, a 2m length of apparently undisturbed, compact light brown soil was uncovered (plate 3) which graded evenly to the pond surface. At its northern end this surface was succeeded by further rubble. The thickness of this rubble layer became apparent during the course of excavating an east-west aligned ditch (plate 4) for the installation of a pipe to drain the ponded area. This showed that the rubble layer was at least 1.5m thick and that it may have been deposited in two phases. There was no evidence of the light brown soil surface described above in the material excavated or in the exposed sections of this channel.
- 2.4 No artefacts were recovered during the course of the works.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 Prior to the commencement of the present works, the area was overgrown and foliage had thickened to a considerably greater extent than when the initial assessment of the works necessary was undertaken in the early summer (A H Elliot *pers comm.*). This tended to mask the extent of the rubble deposited on and around the dyke, necessitating selective thinning of sapling growth.
- 3.2 It is difficult to assess the compacted soil surface exposed some 5m to the north and downslope from the dyke terminal. Sir Cyril Fox describes Offa's Dyke on the south side of the Afon Gwenfro as 'an inconspicuous bank ascending the steep scarp; it does not align accurately with the portion on the other side of the stream' (Fox 1955, 35). Further, his map of this section of dyke (fig. 2) shows it as a dashed line, contrasting with the continuous line shown to the south. It could therefore be argued that the compacted soil surface represents the base of the 'inconspicuous bank', which has been levelled during the past 70 years. The present terminus may therefore correspond with the northern end of the more upstanding section of dyke identified by Fox.
- 3.3 Clearance of rubble from the area around the terminus of the dyke revealed an even profile with no clear evidence of a cut surface on the northern terminal, or on the eastern side immediately adjacent to the access track. It would seem, therefore, that the dyke may not have been truncated during the construction of the access track, as had been previously assumed, and that the present terminal may correspond with that observed by Fox.

4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Mr Howard Elliot, Reading Agricultural Consultants, Mr Richard Tomlinson and Mr Bill Brook.

5 REFERENCES

Fox, C, 1955, *Offa's Dyke*. London: The British Academy.

APPENDIX 1

OFFA'S DYKE, COEDPOETH SPECIFICATION FOR A CONDITIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The proposed works affect a length of Offa's Dyke at Coedpoeth, Wrexham, with the intention of stabilising the surviving earthworks and installing a piped drain.
- 1.2 The proposed works lie within an area designated as a monument of national importance by the National Assembly for Wales and any ground disturbance within the defined area would be subject to Scheduled Monument Consent..
- 1.3 The Inspectorate of Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, in their capacity as archaeological advisers to the National Assembly for Wales, have determined that an archaeological response is required and accordingly archaeological conditions have been incorporated within the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) which describes the scheme of archaeological works required.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are:
 - 2.1.1 to record the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of any archaeological deposits and/or features revealed within the area of the proposed development during the development works in so far as these aims are possible;
 - 2.1.2 to excavate manually and record any archaeological features recorded during the works
 - 2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the watching brief if required

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will be carried out according to the conditions contained within the SMC and will involve the examination of all the groundworks in the archaeological sensitive area.
- 3.2 A measured drawn section and/or plan will be produced at an appropriate scale. A photographic record will be maintained in 35mm black and white and colour slide.
- 3.3 Should any significant archaeological deposits be revealed sufficient opportunity must be allowed for adequate recording and excavation as appropriate. In the event of a discovery of major significance, a site meeting will be arranged with a representative from Cadw to discuss the most appropriate way forward. In the meantime, works affecting such a deposit will be halted.
- 3.4 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared, if required, according to the principles laid out in the SMC. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Catalogue of sites identified with notes on their condition and significance, Conclusions and Recommendations and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991).

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by a skilled and experienced archaeologist. Overall supervision will be by Mr R J Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the watching brief. Copies of the report will be provided to Cadw and to the Regional Sites and Monuments Record.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the watching brief will take no more than three day in all and that the subsequent report would be prepared immediately thereafter, dependent on the client's instructions and the arrangement of a suitable timetable. The date of commencement, at the time of writing, has yet to be agreed with the client.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W.Jones
30th July 2001

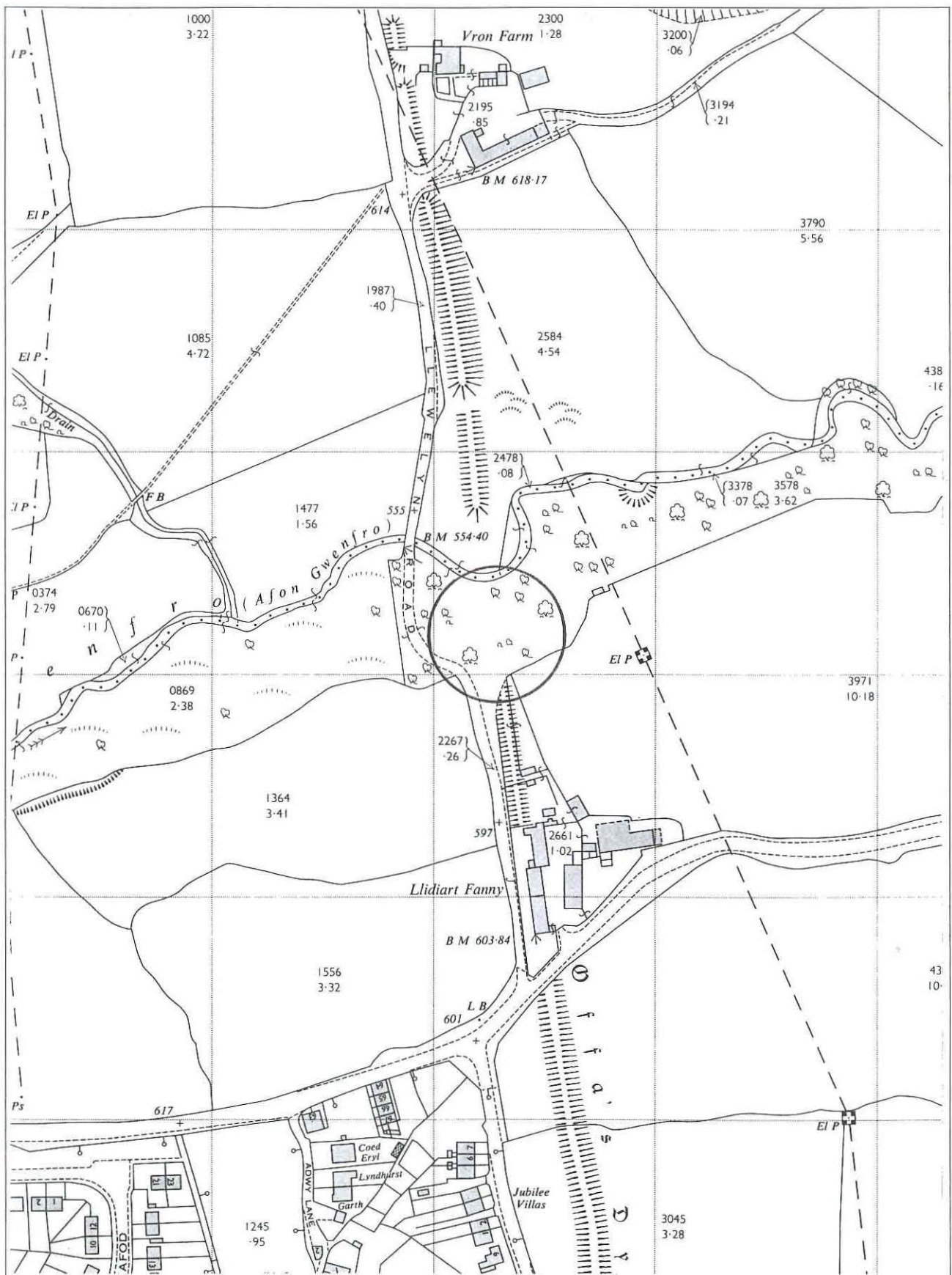


Fig. 1 Location, 1:25,000

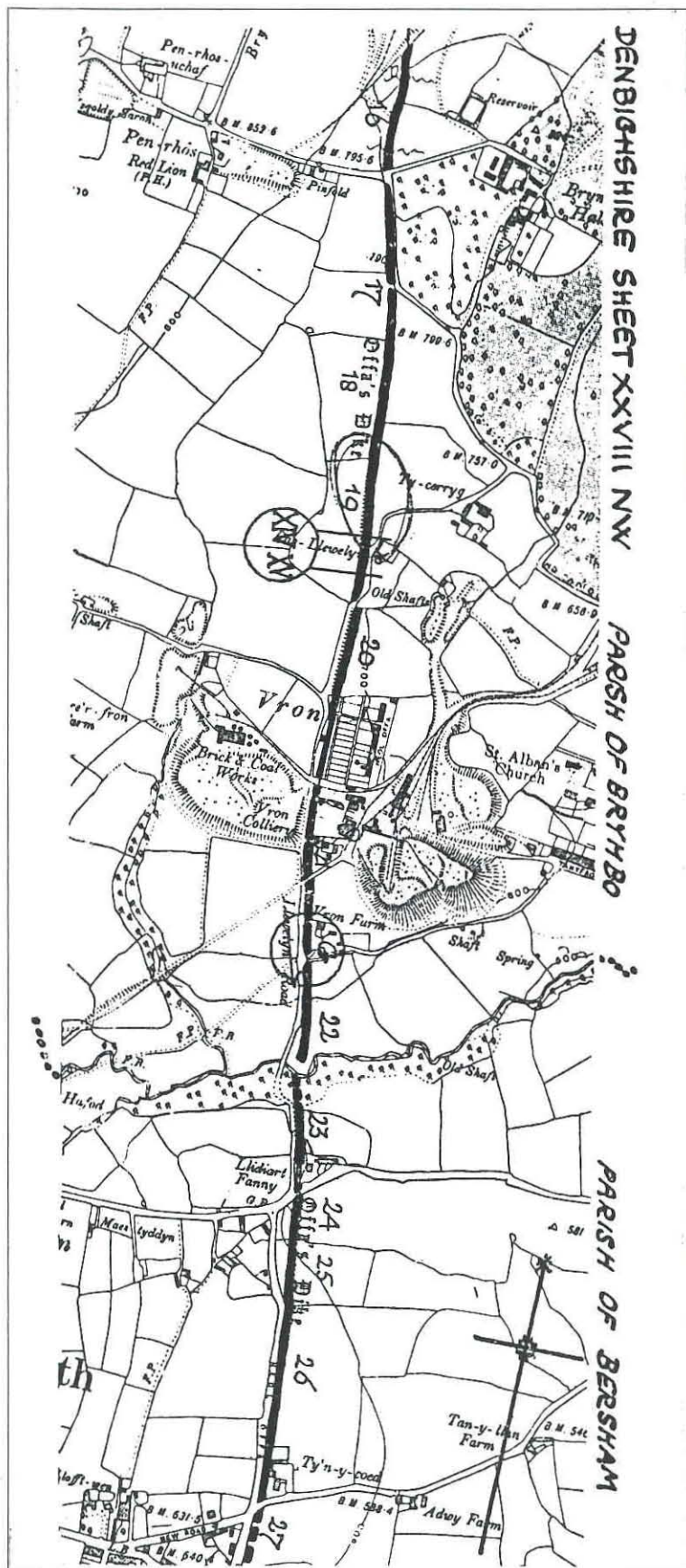


Fig. 2 Section of Offa's Dyke as surveyed by Fox (Fox 1955, fig. 13)



Plate 1 Exposed northern terminus of Offa's Dyke after removal of rubble and topsoil. Photo CPAT 1107.5



Plate 2 Exposed northern terminus of Offa's Dyke after removal of rubble and topsoil. Photo CPAT 1107.9



Plate 3 Ponded area on west side of Offa's Dyke. Photo CPAT 1107.14

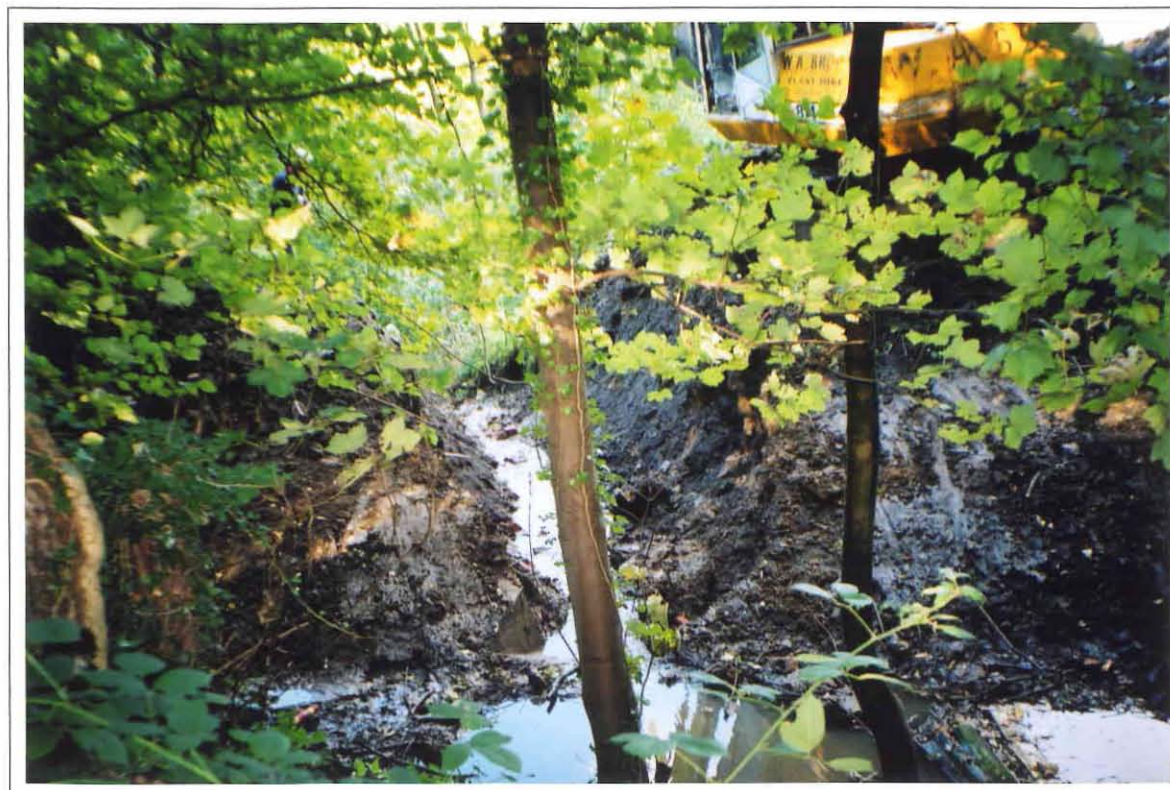


Plate 4 Excavation of drain on the side of ponded area. Photo CPAT 1107.18