

CPAT Report No 1020

14 Heol Offa, Coedpoeth, Wrexham

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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14 Heol Offa, Coedpoeth, Wrexham

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

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December 2009

Report for Mr M Chatterley

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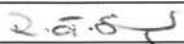

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October 2009 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was invited to undertake an archaeological excavation in connection with the construction of a new extension to 14 Heol Offa, Coedpoeth, Wrexham (SJ 29295095). The excavation was undertaken as a condition of planning consent and a brief for the work (INV 750) had been prepared by the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority.
- 1.2 Information retained within the regional Historic Environment Record indicated that the extension would directly overlie the former alignment of Offa's Dyke, the 8th-century earthwork generally accepted as forming the western boundary of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. It was therefore anticipated that ground disturbance for the new development might disturb surviving buried deposits associated with the dyke.

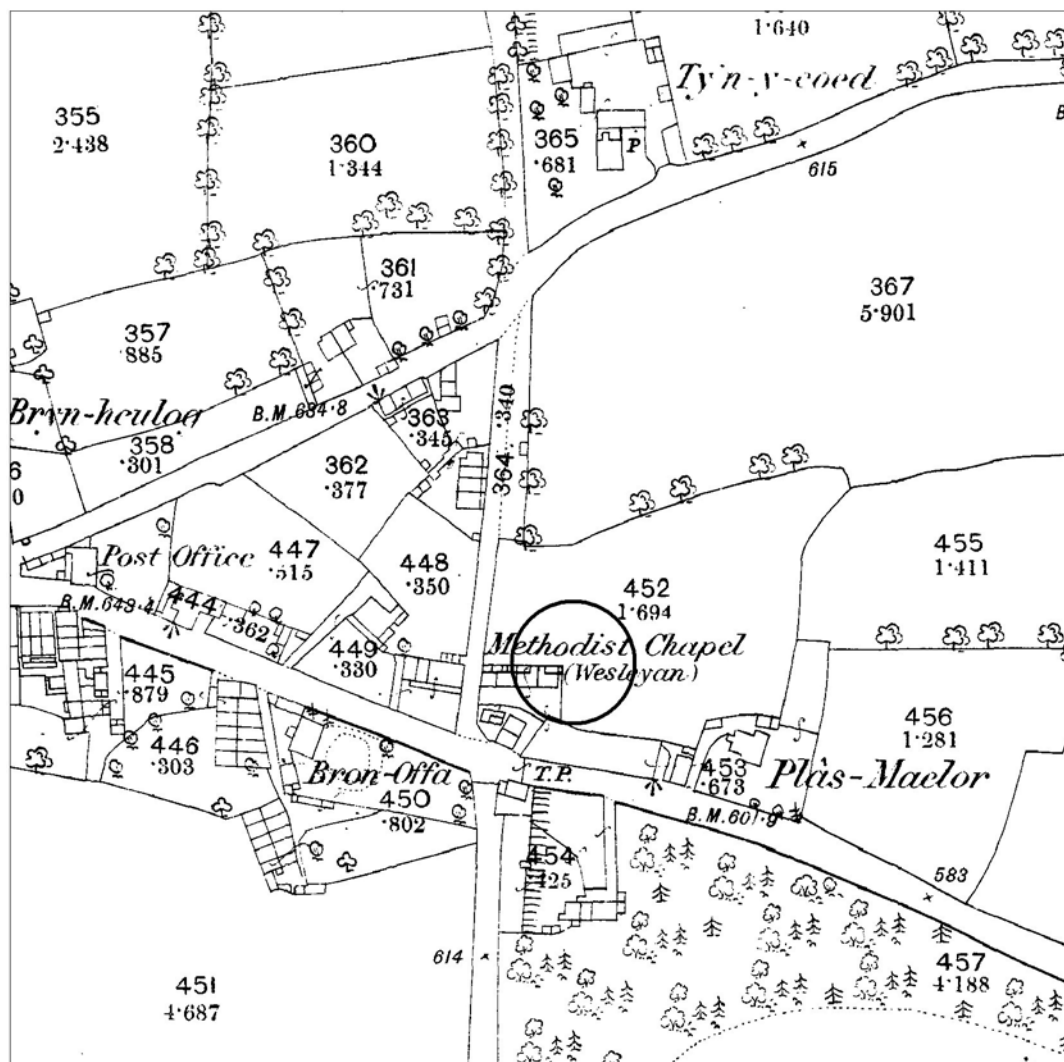


Fig. 1 Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25'' map of 1873 (Denb. 28.6)

2 BACKGROUND & LOCATION

- 2.1 The 8th-century AD earthwork known as Offa's Dyke consists of a large bank with a ditch usually on its western side, and is generally accepted to have formed the western boundary to

the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. It is arguably the major monument of the pre-conquest era in Western Britain, and extensive lengths of it are statutorily protected.

- 2.2 The development plot is located immediately to the east of the existing 14 Heol Offa property in a lawned garden area that is bounded on the west side by a low stone wall. The plot lies on the eastern fringe of the Coedpoeth settlement of Heol Offa and with the A525 to the south. The site lies just 35 metres to the south of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM De 181) which protects surviving upstanding surface earthworks of the dyke. In his survey of Offa's Dyke, Cyril Fox (1955, 36) described this section of the Dyke as follows:

'In the ploughed field 27, (site of SAM De 181) beyond the cross-roads, the almost obliterated bank is visible in evening sunlight on the alignment shown, and in continuation with this line the ploughed-down but quite clearly marked ridge of the Dyke is visible in enclosure 28, close to a chapel. It may be noted that a hamlet adjacent to the Dyke is known as Adwy'r clawdd, indicative of the existence of an ancient (but not necessarily original) gap in the earthwork.'

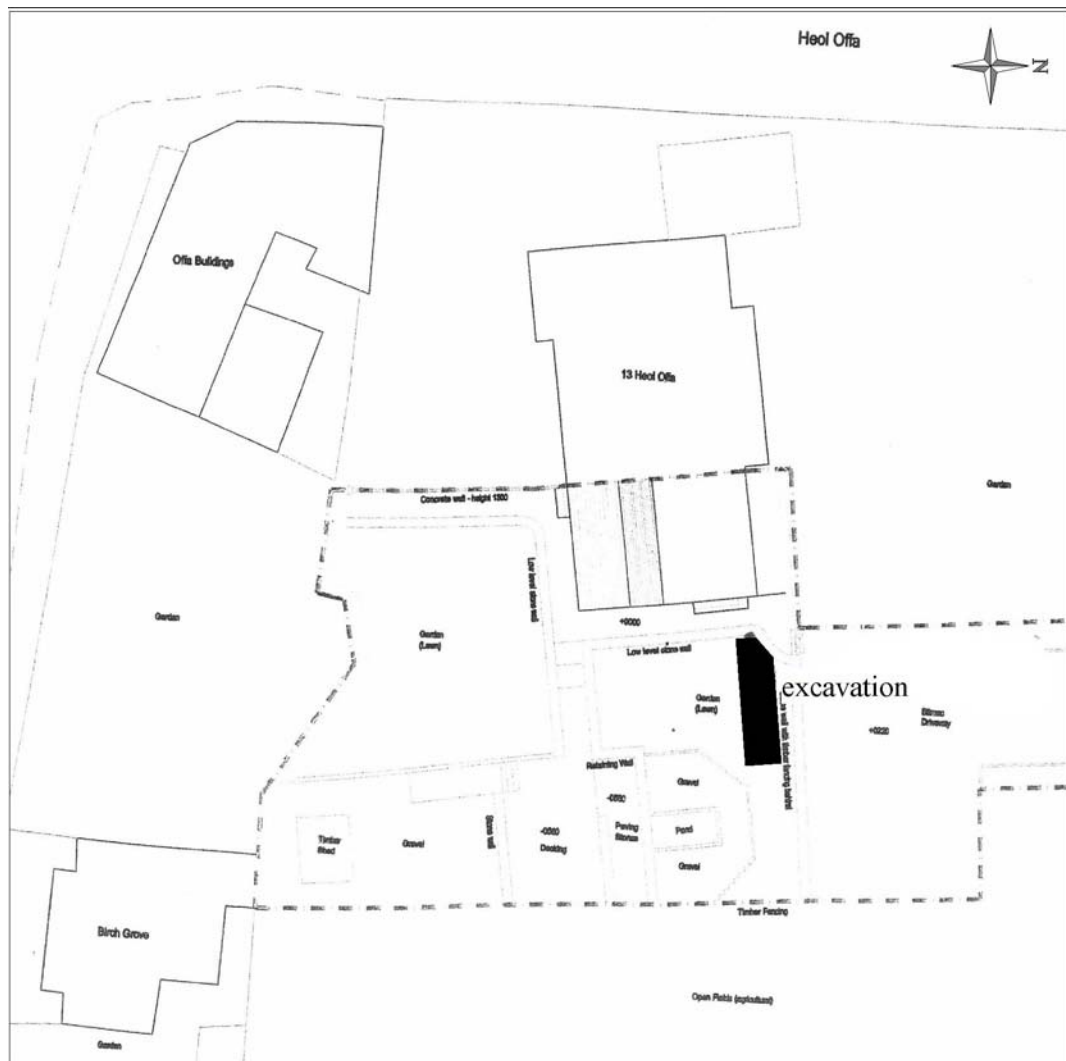


Fig. 2 Location of excavation trench



Plate 1. Location of the trench east of 14 Heol Offa.
Line of Offa's Dyke probably follows the garden hedgerow.
CPAT Photo 2981-012

3 EVALUATION

- 3.1 The excavation, conducted between 10 and 11 November 2009, consisted of a single trench (Fig. 2) 6m long and 2m wide. It was aligned east to west and was located immediately east of the low stone wall referred to in section 2.2. The evaluation process is essentially non-destructive and is designed to determine the depth at which any archaeologically sensitive deposits have survived, together with as much information as possible about their nature, condition and significance. The modern overburden was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision, down to the surface of the first significant archaeological horizon. Thereafter, all excavation was undertaken by hand. During the excavation a written, drawn and photographic record was maintained, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records that are defined and detailed in full in the site archive. The archive is to be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record and the landowner (Mr M Chatterley) is to take receipt of the finds assemblage.
- 3.2 Upon removing the modern overburden the trench sections illustrated successive tip-lines of 18th and 19th century deposits that had been imported onto the site in order to landscape the general area. It became evident that the natural hillslope, which drops towards the east, lies on natural bedrock of pale orange-grey plated sandstone (13) (Plate 2). The bedrock was quite fragmentary and consequently could be quarried out with some ease. Overlying this was a deposit of pale grey silty clay mixed with fragmented sandstone (15). The deposit, up to 0.2m thick, possibly represents the ploughed down remains of the dyke embankment to the west. The compacted surface was sealed by a thin charcoal-flecked lense (0.15m thick) of pale orange sandy silt (07). This material was quite 'turf-like' and compacted to the touch, suggesting it might be an old ground surface post-dating a period of possible significant dyke erosion. There was no evidence of post-medieval activity within the deposit, implying it might be of medieval (or earlier) origin.



Plate 2. Trench, after the initial clean, viewed from the east. CPAT Photo 2981-001

- 3.3 At the west end of the trench the deposit 07 was sealed by a firm deposit of yellow brown sandy silt mixed with small rounded pebbles (06). The deposit (up to 0.3m thick) had the appearance of either hillwash or possibly more ploughed-down dyke material. Owing to the lack of post-medieval artefactual evidence it is presumed that the material pre-dates the 17th and 18th centuries. The material did not survive to the east, where it had been evidently removed through garden landscaping. Overlying this, and extending throughout the length of the trench, was a thick (0.4m) deposit of mid yellow-grey sandy silt (05). This material, which contained exclusively 18th-century pottery fragments in the form of slipwares, had similar properties to the earlier deposits suggesting the material had not been imported but rather represented a period of landscaping during the Georgian era.
- 3.4 The deposits 04, 02 and 03 that overlay and subsequently post-dated the layer 05 had all been imported onto the site and represented a general period from the mid-19th century onwards to the present day. Typical characteristics of these layers were lenses of coal and cinder-rich sandy silts, fairly loose with fragments of brick and mortar building debris. Artefactual evidence was in the form of a mixed range of pottery from the 18th through to the 20th century. All of these deposits had been truncated by a 0.1m diameter salt-glazed ceramic water drain, orientated west to east, that traversed the length of the trench. Additionally, a large pit (12) (the edge of which lay beyond the south-east of the trench) also truncated the aforementioned deposits. The pit 12 contained deposits of modern white aggregate and it has been assumed that its function was as a form of drainage soakaway.



Plate 3. South and west-facing sections. CPAT Photo 2981-007



Plate 4. North-facing section. CPAT Photo 2981-004

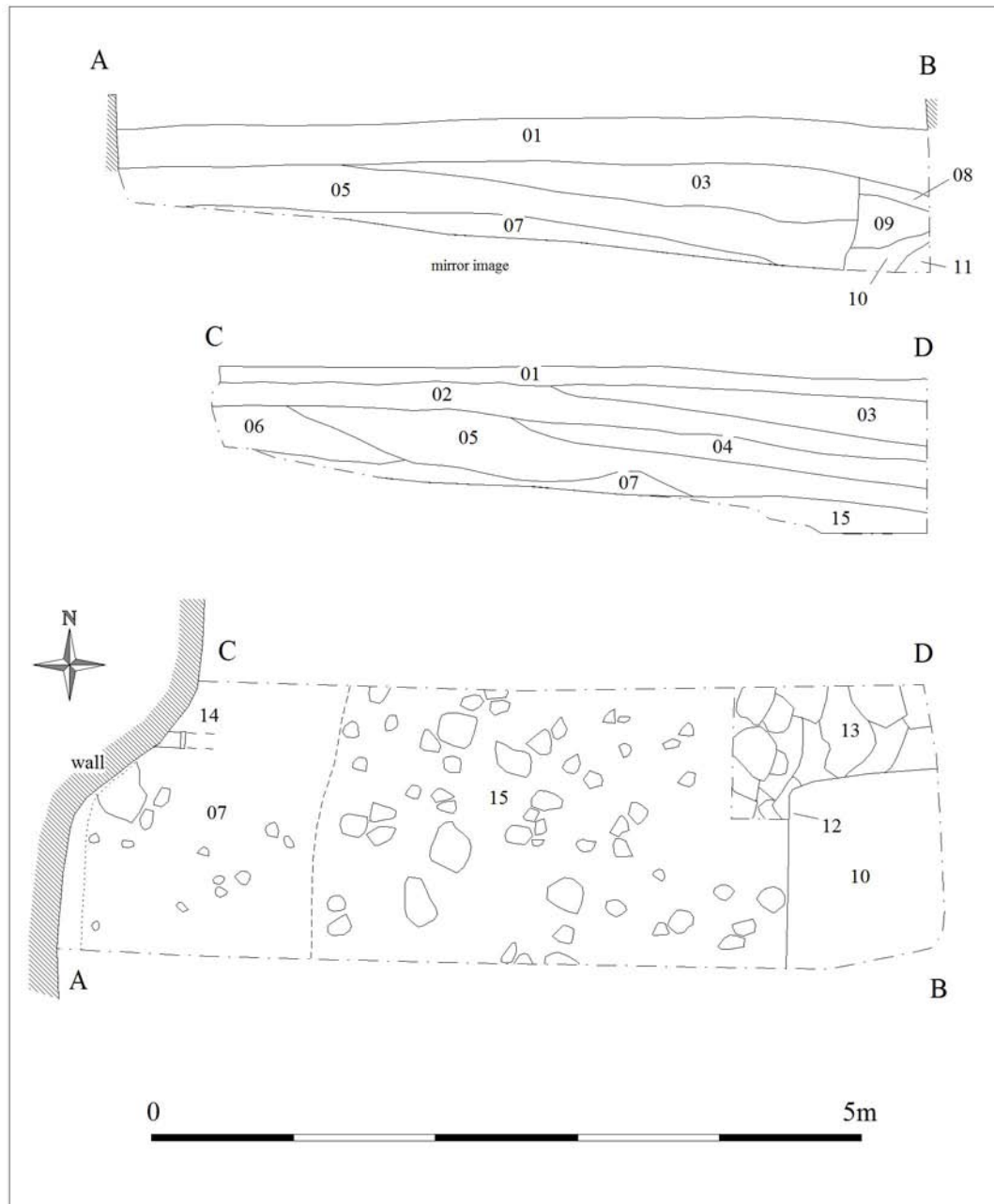


Fig.3 North and south-facing sections together with overall post-excavation Trench Plan.

- 3.5 Finally, the whole area was sealed by a dark greyish-black sandy silt (01). This garden topsoil deposit had a fairly uniform thickness of 0.44m on the south side of the site, thinning out to 0.1m to the north. It contained a wide range of fragmented post-medieval pottery, ranging from a solitary sherd of a highly fired 16th/17th-century jar to late 19th/20th-century transfer printed tea-wares.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The evaluation produced no direct evidence for the survival of in-situ deposits relating to Offa's Dyke within the area immediately east and adjacent to 14 Heol Offa. There is some suggestion that the lower stone fragmented deposits might well be the remains of ploughed-down dyke material from the west. From this we may conclude that the alignment of Offa's Dyke is either below or to the west of the upstanding cottage.

- 4.2 The bulk of the deposits recorded during the excavation illustrate a long-term period of landscaping in the general vicinity of 14 Heol Offa. The artefactual evidence suggests this started around the early 18th century and has continued through to the present day.

5 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones and Ian Davies, CPAT; the landowners Mr and Mrs Chatterley, 14 Heol Offa, and Nick Hughes for undertaking the machine excavation.

6 REFERENCES

6.1 Documentary Sources

Fox, C. 1955. *Offa's Dyke. A field survey of the western frontier-works of Mercia in the seventh and eighth centuries AD.* London: Oxford University Press.

6.2 Cartographic Sources

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1873 (Denb. 28.6)

APPENDIX 1**PROJECT ARCHIVE****Site records**

14 context record forms

Context Register

Drawing Register

02 A3 site drawing

12 digital photographs, CPAT film 2981

Photographic register

Context	Drawing	Type	Comment
01	2,3	Deposit	Topsoil, garden soil 20/21 st century
02	3	Deposit	Dark grey yellowish sand silt below 03 Late 18 th early 19 th century
03	2,3	Deposit	Dark black cinder below 01 Early 19 th century ?
04	3	Deposit	Dark yellow/grey sand silt below 02 18/19 th century
05	2,3	Deposit	Yellow grey sand silt below 04 18 th century
06	2,3	Deposit	Mid yellow/brown sand silt below 05 Pre – 17/18 th century
07	1,2,3	Deposit	Pale orange/grey silt + charcoal below 06. Possible old groundsurface. Medieval?
08	2	Fill	Yellow/grey modern sand silt, fill of 12 20 th century
09	2	Fill	Modern white drainage aggregate, fill of 12 20 th century
10	1,2	Fill	Dark grey cinders, below 09, fill of 12 19/20 th century
11	2	Fill	White powdery mortar/building debris, below 10, fill of 12. 19/20 th century
12	1,2	Cut	Modern pit of unknown use (soakaway?) Post mid 19 th century
13	1,2	Deposit	Natural bedrock, plated mudstone
14	1	Structure	0.1m dia, salt glazed ceramic water pipe late 20 th century
15	1,2,3	Deposit	Fragmented natural mudstone mixed with pale orange/grey silt, possible ploughed down Dyke embankment material.

Dwg	Size	Scale	Comment
1	A3	1:20	Post excavation plan of the trench
2	A3	1:20	North facing section of the trench
3	A3	1:20	South facing section of the trench