

**CPAT Report No 1053**

# **Dyffryd, Maesbrook, Shropshire**

**WATCHING BRIEF**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**CPAT Report No 1053**

# Dyffryd, Maesbrook, Shropshire

## **WATCHING BRIEF**

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September 2010

Report for Environment Agency



**CPAT**

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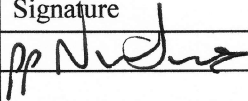
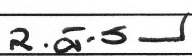
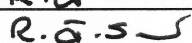
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## CPAT Report Record

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In June 2010 the Field Services section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was contacted by Christian Wilcox of the Environment Agency with a request for a quotation to carry out an archaeological watching brief during flood defence bank refurbishment works at Dyffryd, near the confluence of the River Vyrnwy with a conduit of the River Morda, in the parish of Maesbrook in Shropshire (SJ 291 202).
- 1.2 The works included the removal of some sections of the existing flood defence bank, and the alteration of the profile for those sections of bank which were being retained and had been recommended by the Environment Agency archaeologist, Jen Richards, who identified two areas of interest which might be affected by the refurbishment scheme. The first related to the alteration of the existing flood defence bank at NGR SJ 2944 1993, where it was in close proximity to a palaeochannel (former river course), while the other part of the work involved the examination of a redundant section of the flood defence bank during its removal, to gain information regarding its construction and, if possible, dating.
- 1.3 The CPAT quotation was acceptable and all the required elements of the work were carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

## **2 LOCATION**

- 2.1 Dyffryd lies some 8km south of the town of Oswestry in western Shropshire and occupies part of the flood plain of the River Vyrnwy at its confluence with the River Morda, as mentioned above. The elevation of the locality is approximately 60m OD.
- 2.2 About 3km to the west of the site, the River Vyrnwy emerges from its rather narrow valley into the larger vale occupied by the River Severn. The confluence of these two large watercourses is only 2.5km to the south-east which makes this low-lying area particularly prone to flooding, necessitating the flood defence works herein described.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The flood defences at the time of the watching brief comprised a low meandering embankment running along the east side of the River Morda conduit, then turning east (and later south-east) to mirror the overall alignment of the River Vyrnwy. The location of the palaeochannel is readily seen on Fig 1, as it is followed by the line of the boundary between England and Wales, which loops away from the north-east side of the Vyrnwy after following the centre of the existing river course, and then shortly returns to it.
- 3.2 An examination of the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping (Montgomeryshire 11.10, dated 1886) reveals a similar picture. The implication is that when the boundary was defined, the river occupied the course now defined by the palaeochannel, and it is interesting to note that the 1799 enclosure map of Llandysilio and Llandrinio parishes in the adjacent part of Wales describes a number of similar deviations in the boundary as 'Ancient bed of the river', which indicates that it was still recognised as such locally when the map was created.
- 3.3 Although it remains a conjecture for the present, the most probable origin of this boundary is at the time of the Act of Union between England and Wales in 1536, with the subsequent

alteration of the river course being at some intervening point which was still sufficiently recent for the old course to have been remembered in 1799. In any event the former river channel was almost certainly occupied by the Vyrnwy in the Tudor era.

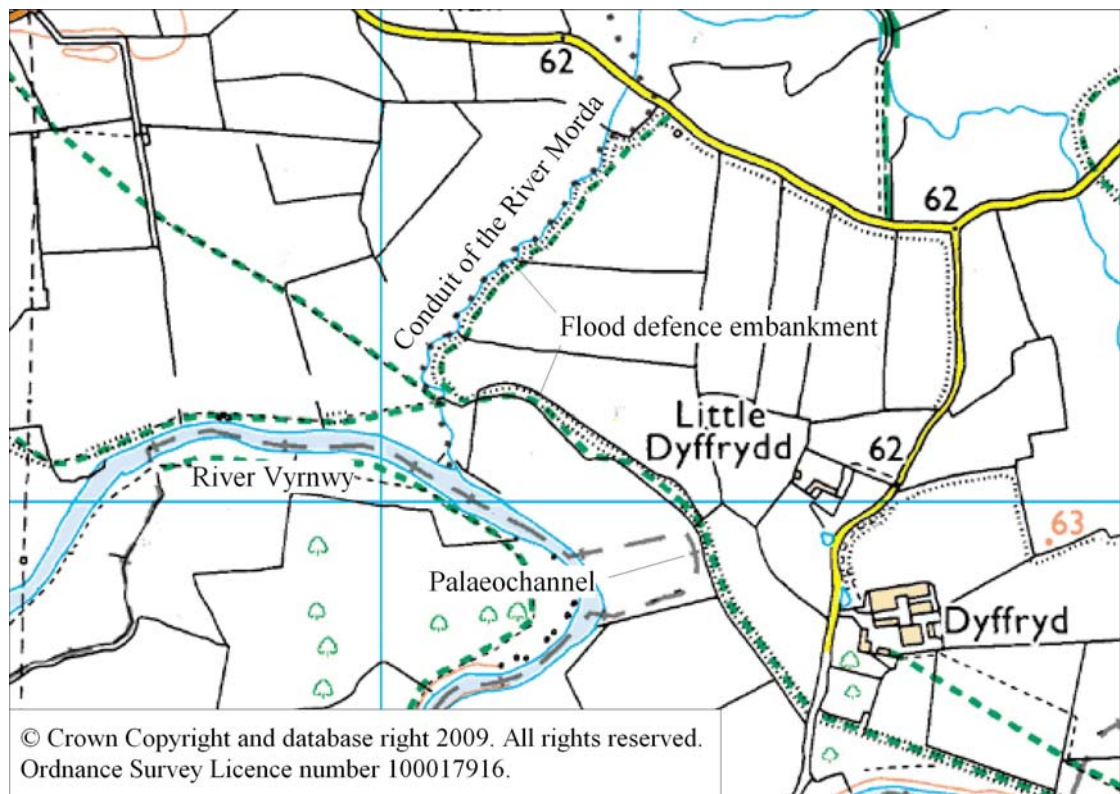


Fig. 1 Overall site location

#### 4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The removal of the topsoil cover on the section of flood defence bank nearest the palaeochannel was observed during the watching brief, but no evidence of significant deposits was noted and it was evident that the channel lay on the opposite side of a hedged field boundary to the bank. It was not thought to be worthwhile examining this area further as the remodelling work involved adding soil to the opposite side of the embankment, away from the channel, and there would therefore be no opportunity to examine the channel deposits.
- 4.2 A section was cut across the embankment at NGR SJ 29168 20309 (See Fig. 2 and Plate 1, below) to provide a view of its internal structure, but this proved to be relatively uninformative, the bank makeup beneath the mid grey-brown silty topsoil (1) being a single deposit of brown and grey clayey silt (2) containing no datable material and resting on natural yellowish-brown clayey silt (3). The overall width of the bank was approximately 9.0m, and its crest was 1.4m above the old ground surface on which it was built. On its north-west side, the edge of the bank overlay what appeared to be a small section of an infilled former course (4) of the River Morda, although only about 2m of this was visible before the present course of the river conduit was encountered.

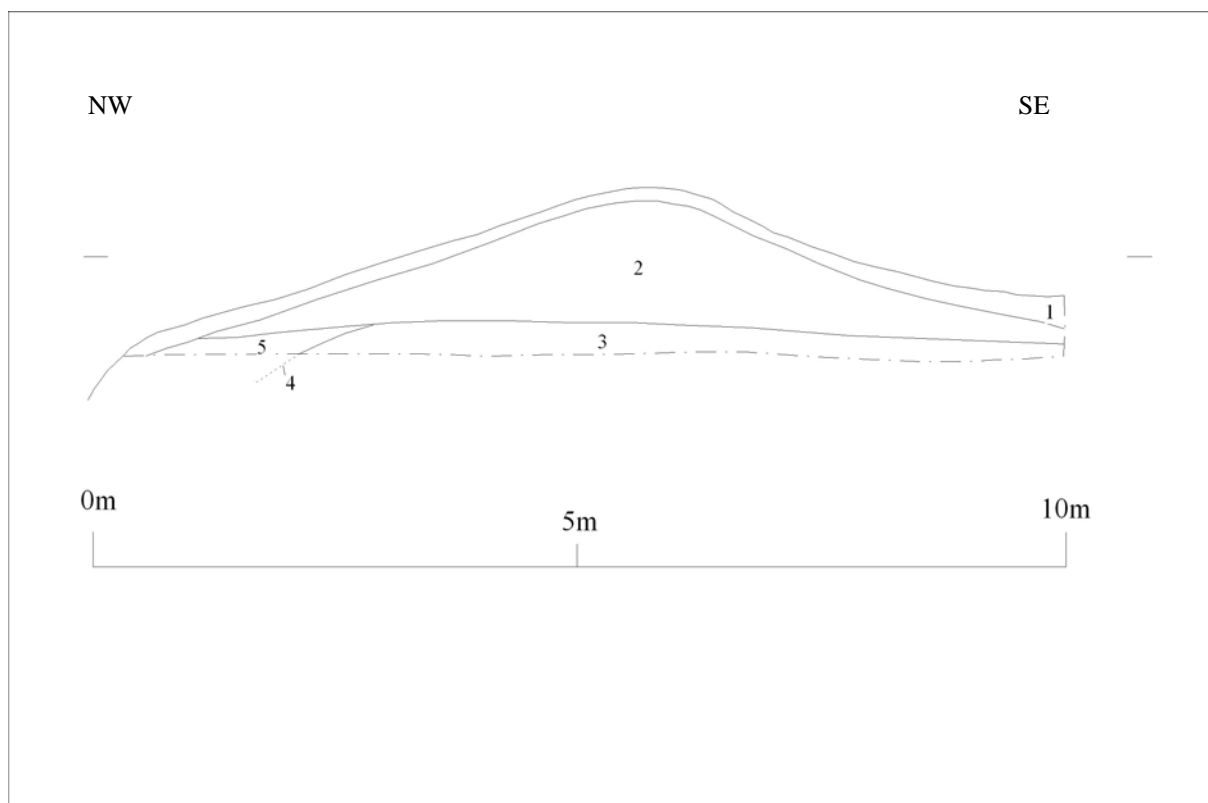


Fig. 2 Section of the former flood defence bank at SJ 29168 20309



Plate 1 Section across the flood defence bank at SJ 29168 20309, from SW (Photo CPAT 3144-0004)

- 4.3 The flood defence bank was depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 (see above) and it is likely that it was constructed in the period immediately following the enclosure act of 1799, when other, similar, flood defences were created in this locality along the courses of the Rivers Vyrnwy and Severn.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The watching brief successfully recorded evidence for the construction of the flood defence bank at Dyffryd, a feature which is likely to have been built soon after the passing of the enclosure act for Llandrinio and Llandysilio parishes, in 1799. A representative section was drawn of the bank, prior to its removal and replacement with a new bank on a straighter alignment.
- 5.2 A palaeochannel adjacent to the flood defence bank had been identified by the Environment Agency archaeologist, as being under potential threat of disturbance by the bank improvement works, but it became clear during the watching brief that the channel would not be affected as it lay on the opposite side of a hedge boundary. The defence bank works at this locality involved moving the axis of the bank away from the boundary in question, works on the channel side of the existing bank being restricted to the removal of a thin layer of topsoil, an operation which was observed during the watching brief and produced no significant finds or features.
- 5.3 A brief desk-top assessment was undertaken using sources readily accessible at CPAT and this demonstrated that the palaeochannel was likely to have been a historical feature, and was still an active watercourse in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore thought that it would not repay any significant investigations, should these be considered in future.
- 5.4 With the exception of the old flood defence bank itself, which is thought to date from soon after the enclosure act for the area was passed in 1799, it does not appear that any archaeologically significant deposits or features were affected by the flood defence bank refurbishment works.

## **6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank Christian Wilcox and the site staff of the Environment Agency for their help and assistance during the project.

## **7 SOURCES**

Ordnance Survey first edition map (Montgomeryshire 11.10), dated 1886

Enclosure Act map of Llandrinio and Llandysilio parishes, dated 1799