

**CPAT Report No 995**

# **Wat's Dyke, Penyffordd, Mold**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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**Wat's Dyke, Penyffordd, Mold**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**W J Owen**

May 2009

Report for SP Power Systems Ltd

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

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## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

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tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179

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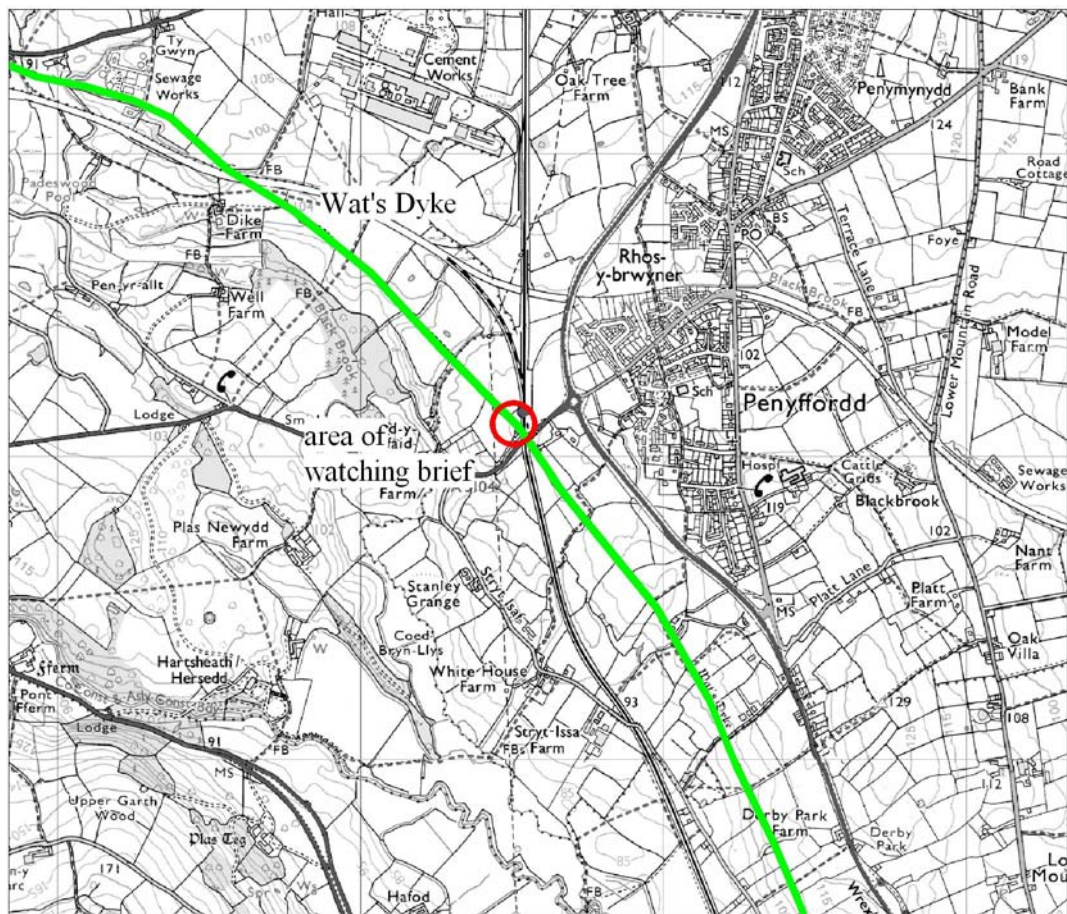
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2009 the Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Edwin Davies, Estates and Wayleaves Officer for SP Power Systems Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of a fibre optic underground cable crossing the line of Wat's Dyke at Penyffordd, near Mold, in Flintshire.
- 1.2 The cable route crossed the dyke at a point where no visible earthworks survived, the line of the dyke here marked only by a scarp topped by hedgerow (the lower ground lying to the west of this). The section of dyke immediately to the north, however, is still upstanding, running north-west to south-east and protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Fl 089). SP Power Systems Ltd were advised by Cadw that scheduled monument consent was not required, although they were recommended to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation.

## 2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The section of pipeline observed during the watching brief lies in a field on the west side of Penyffordd railway station, 6km east-south-east of Mold and 0.75km west of Penyffordd village (Fig. 1; SJ 29526111).



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Fig. 1 Watching brief location.



### 3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Wat's Dyke extends for around 40 miles from Basingwerk near Holywell in Flintshire to the River Severn at Maesbury in Shropshire. It is of similar construction to the longer Offa's Dyke and runs on a close and roughly parallel course to it. The relationship between the two dykes and their relative dates remain uncertain
- 3.2 The likely date of construction of Wat's Dyke is, however, thought to be in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, although some doubts have recently been expressed about this. It is assumed to be a boundary marking the edge of Mercian territory, but it is uncertain if it was of a defensive nature, and no evidence of substantial defences have yet been evident from excavated sections
- 3.3 A ditch, up to 5m wide and 3m deep (though on average only 3m wide and 1.5 – 2m deep) lies on its western (Welsh) side; thus the monument should be seen as protecting English lands.

### 4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was conducted on 11 May 2009, monitoring the excavation by machine of a cable trench around 0.5m wide and up to 1.2m deep at the point where it crossed the line of Wat's Dyke. A photographic, drawn and written record was maintained which has been deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record.

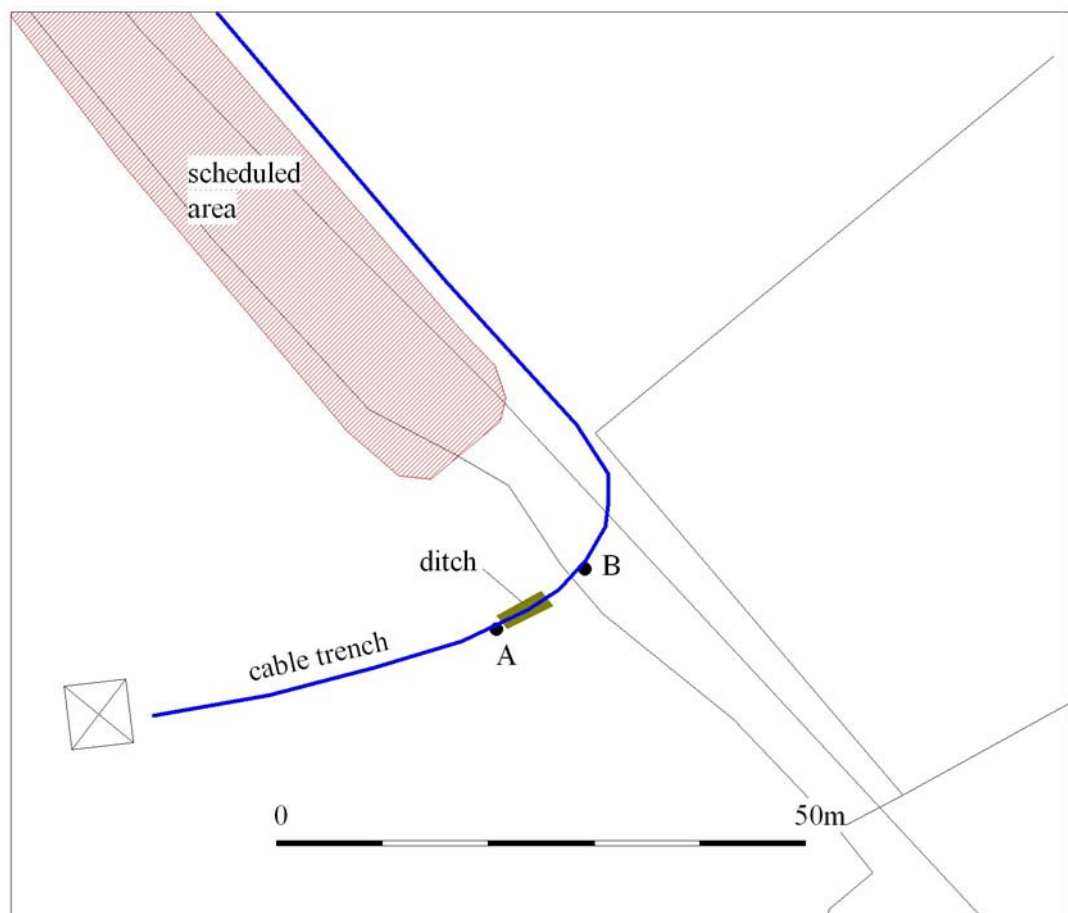


Fig. 2 Plan of the cable trench crossing the line of Wat's Dyke

- 4.2 The watching brief observed the excavation of a 20m-length of gently curving cable trench from a point in the field 14m to the west of a gateway in the hedgerow which tops the line of the dyke, to a point 6m east of the gateway. From that point the cable trench changed direction, curving sharply northwards to take a north-westerly course mirroring the line of the dyke but avoiding the scheduled area (Fig. 2).

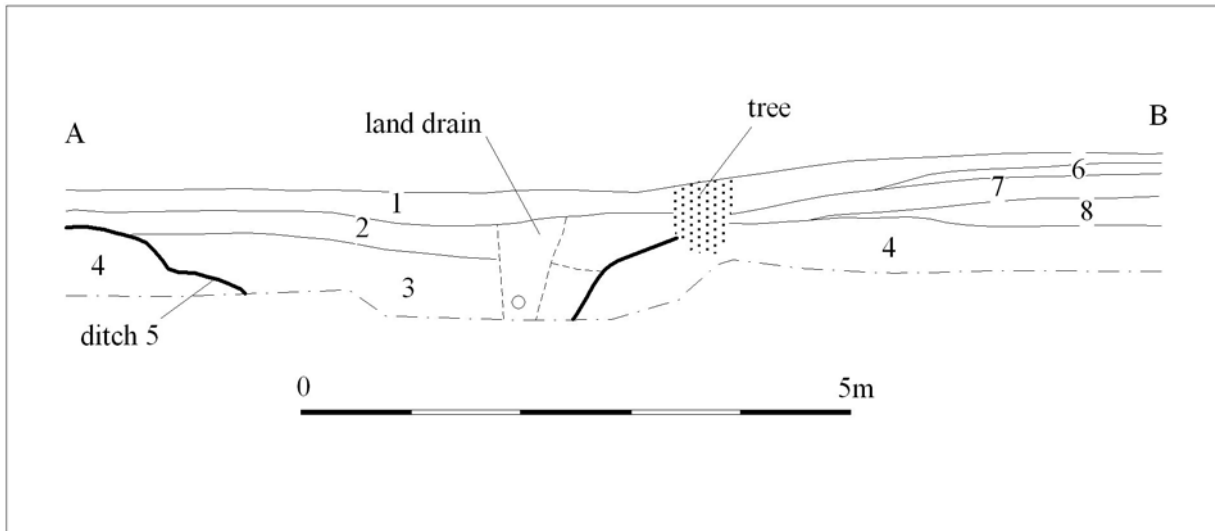


Fig. 3 South-facing section crossing Wat's Dyke

- 4.3 In the field west of the hedge line a fairly shallow ploughsoil (layer 1) *c.* 0.25m deep of dark grey-brown silty loam overlay a layer of stiff brownish-grey clay-silt (layer 2), 0.2m thick. Beneath lay a very stiff silty clay subsoil (layer 4), varying in colour from pinkish brown to yellowish brown, and containing occasional stones up to 0.20m across.
- 4.4 Immediately west of the field bank, at a depth of 0.4m, and sealed by layer 2, a thick deposit of soft, damp brownish-grey silt (layer 3) was observed, which extended westwards for *c.* 4.25m. It seems probable that this deposit represents the upper fill of the ditch (5) associated with Wat's Dyke.
- 4.5 Within the cable trench a number of ceramic land drains were encountered at depths of around 0.7m below the ground surface. The drains were presumed to be feeding into a larger diameter ceramic drain which was observed near the base of the hedge bank at a depth of *c.* 1.0m, having been cut into the upper fill of the ditch.
- 4.6 Adjacent to the gateway the soils below the hedge bank were much disturbed by the roots of a mature tree, whose main roots followed the line of the interface between the soft grey ditch silt (3) and the stiff clay subsoil.
- 4.7 To the east of the hedge line the ground is level and here the topsoil was very thin (*c.* 0.1m), with a rubble layer (6) beneath it, containing fairly modern brick, presumably laid as levelling and hardcore for vehicle access through the gateway. Disturbance made it difficult to determine the nature of the deposits beneath the rubble layer, although this clearly sealed a layer of yellowish-brown silty clay (7) and a dark grey silty layer (8) directly above the natural clay subsoil.





Plate 1 The curving pipe trench on western side of the hedge line. Scale rods mark the position of the edges of the ditch (5)



Plate 2 Pipe trench on western side of the hedge line viewed from south-south-west. Scale rods mark the position of the edges of the ditch (5)





Plate 3 South-facing section of pipe trench showing upper ditch silts (3)

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 In the area of the watching brief the line of Wat's Dyke is preserved by a scarp, topped by a hedgerow, with lower ground to the west. The watching brief revealed the upper fill of the ditch along the western side of the dyke, which at this point measured 4.2m in width, although the depth of the trench was insufficient to identify the base of the ditch, or its lower silts.
- 5.2 There was no obvious remnant bank material surviving, although the cable trench ran through a gateway at the point at which it cut through the line of the dyke and it was evident that the area had been disturbed by the deposition of rubble to form a rough trackway. It is possible that deposits observed beneath the rubble could be associated with this relatively recent makeup.