

**CPAT Report No 1108**

# Dyers Hall Farm Ring-ditch, Pool Quay, Powys

**TRIAL EXCAVATION 2011**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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September 2011

Report for Cadw

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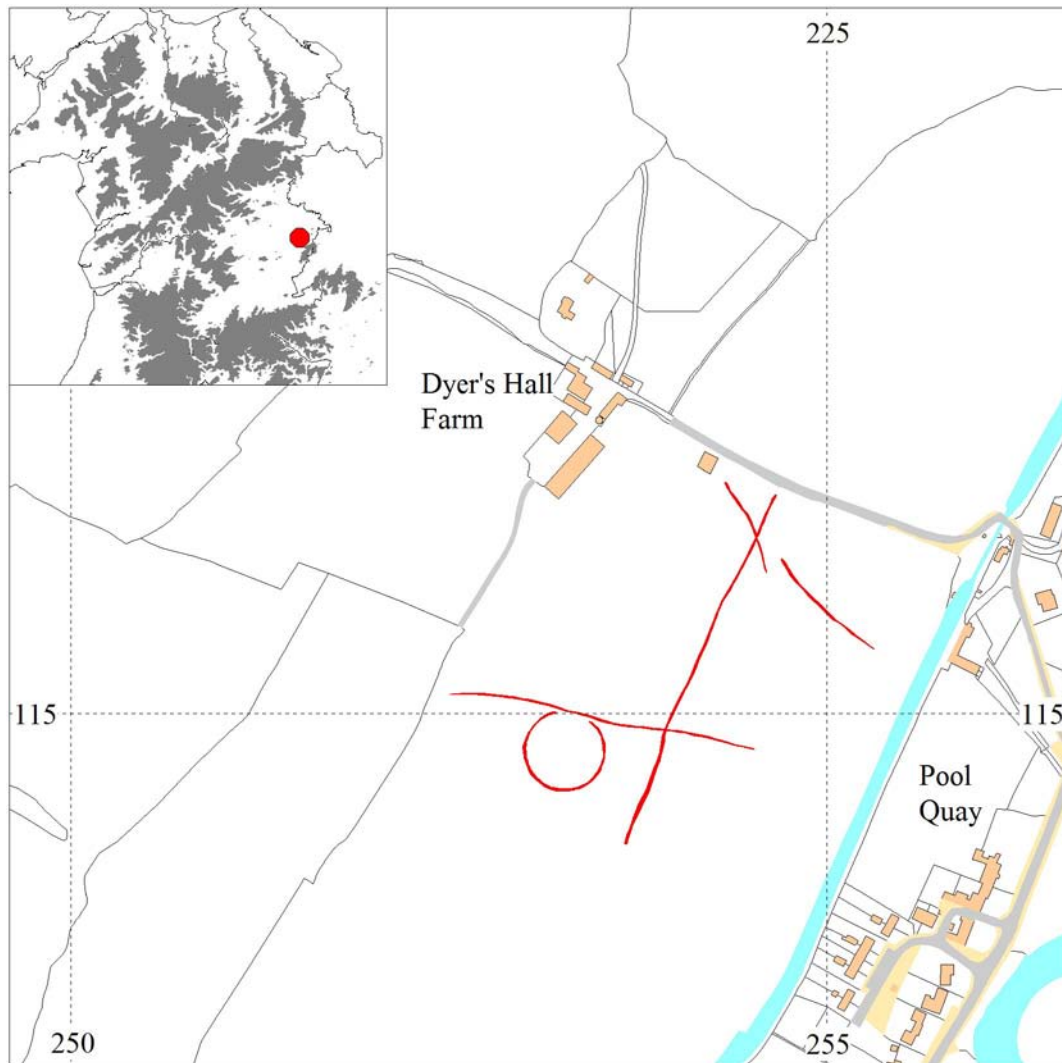
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A programme of small-scale excavation and geophysical survey was undertaken on the site of a large ring-ditch (PRN 38135) at Dyers Hall Farm, Pool Quay, in Powys (Fig. 1; SJ 25334 11475), in May 2011. The work was funded by Cadw as part of a study of unusually large ring-ditches in the region which was undertaken following the completion of the pan-Wales survey of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments. Previous work for the study included a trial excavation on the site of a 100m-diameter ring ditch at Walton Court in the Walton Basin which indicated that the monument had been constructed before 2570-2300 BC (Jones 2010).



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Fig. 1 Location of the Dyers Hall Farm ring-ditch

- 1.2 Across Britain a class of supersized ring-ditches has been recognised which appear to fall within the category of so-called ‘formative henges’, dating to the Middle Neolithic. The Clwyd-Powys area has 14 sites which are around 40m or more in diameter, including the exceptionally large example at Walton Court, all of which are known only from cropmark evidence and are considered to be under a continuing threat from ploughing. There is a distinct cluster of these sites around the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence which includes the site at Pool Quay.

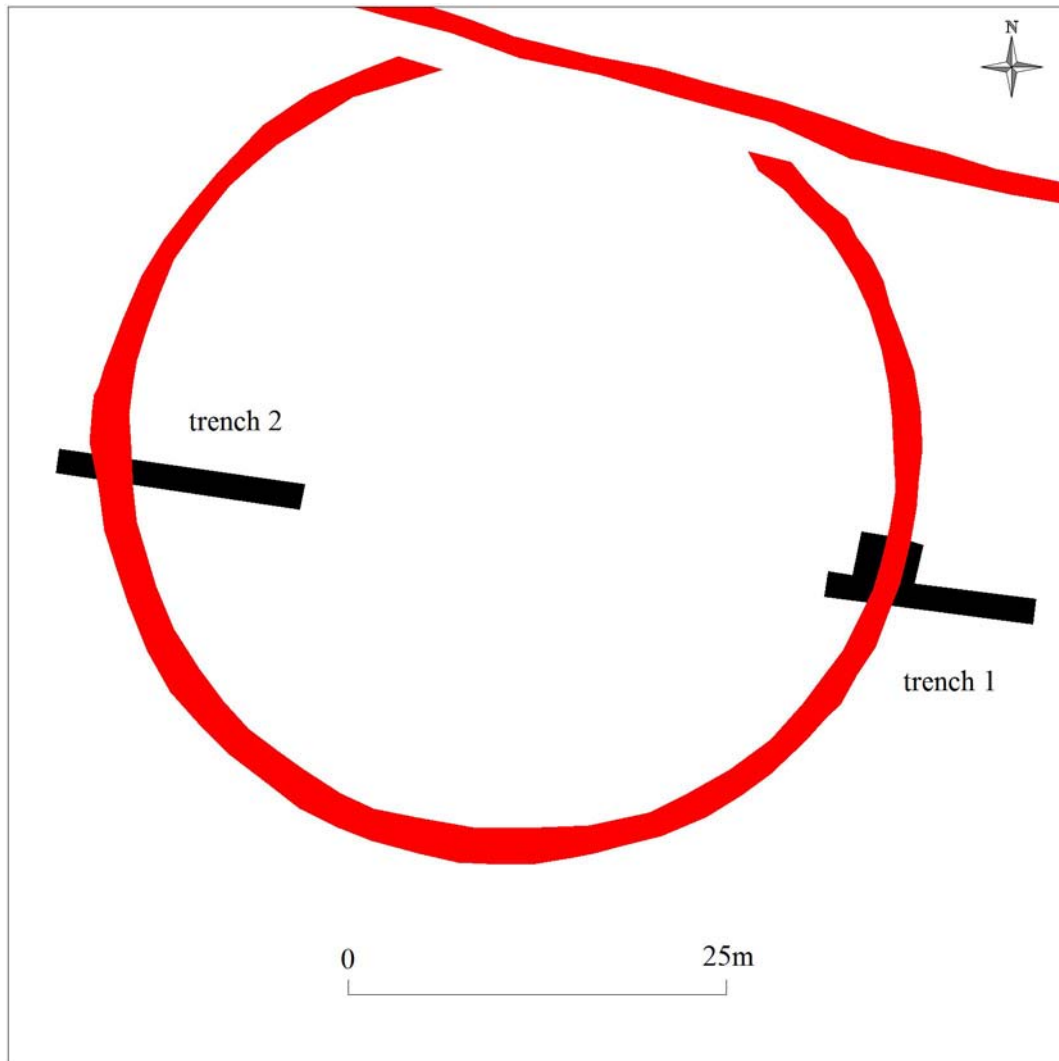


Fig. 2 Plan of the Dyers Hall Farm ring-ditch showing the position of the excavation trenches.

## 2 EXCAVATION

2.1 The trial excavation comprised two trenches, each 1.5m wide, positioned to investigate the ring-ditch at opposing points on the east and west sides. The modern ploughsoil (1) was removed by machine onto the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted here of stony clay. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records in the site archive.

### **Trench 1**

2.2 Trench 1, which was 13.8m in length, was positioned on the east side of the ring-ditch, revealing a ditch (6) 3.7m wide and up to 1.3m deep, with sloping sides and a flat base (Figs 3-5). Initially, the ditch was hard to identify owing to the presence of a deposit of yellow/brown clay-silt (7), which sealed the upper fills of the ditch (8 and 9) and had only been partly removed during machining.

2.3 The primary fill (13) consisted of yellow/brown, stiff, clay-silt (13), up to 0.48m thick, which was sealed by a similar, tough more stony deposit (12) with a maximum thickness of 0.35m.

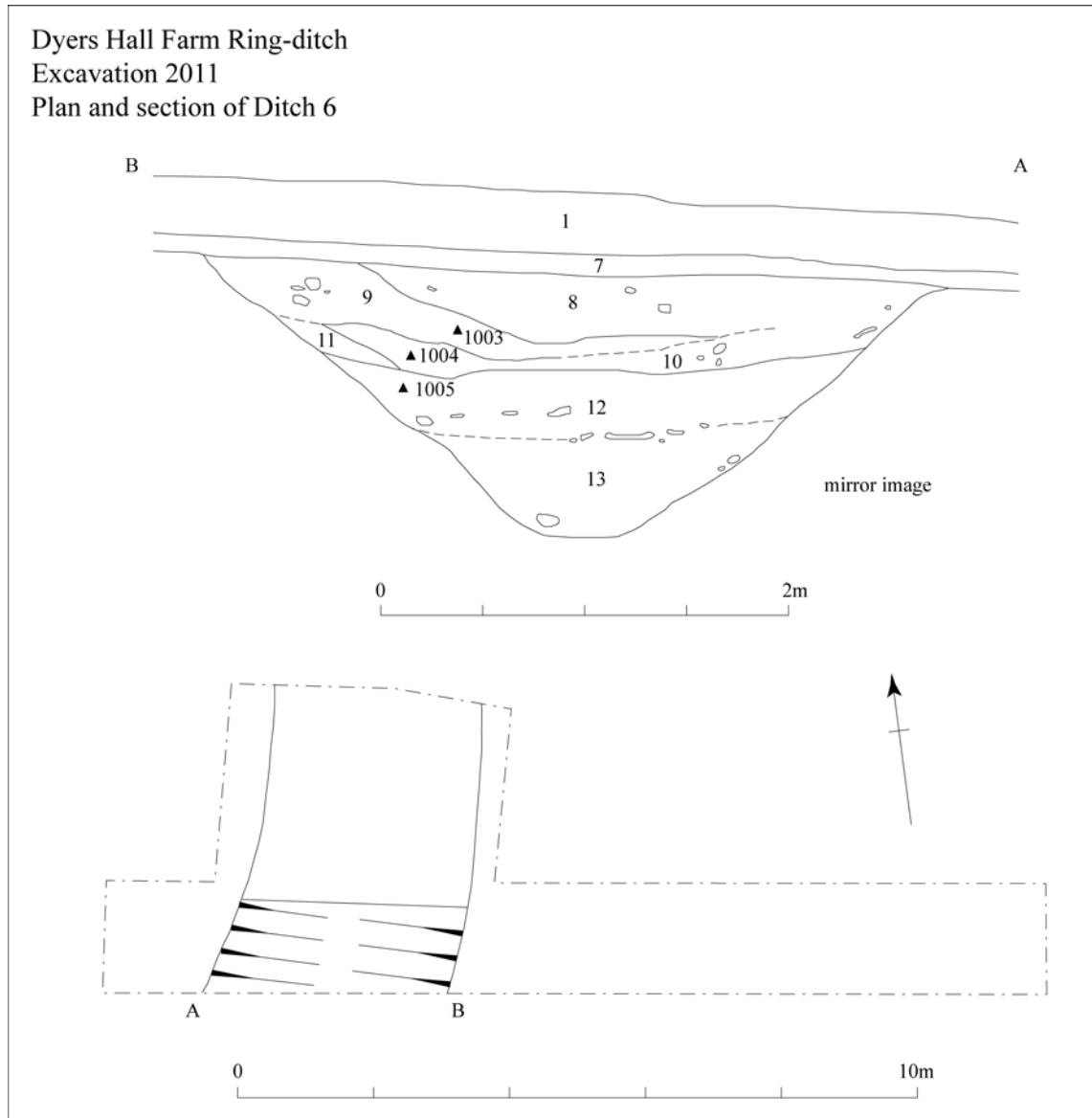


Fig. 3 Plan and section of ditch 6

- 2.4 A sequence of clay and clay-silt deposits in the upper fills (9, 10 and 11) had all been derived from the inner edge of the ditch, perhaps indicating the former presence of an internal bank, of which no visible trace remained. The final infill consisted of a layer of dark, grey/brown, clay-silt (8), which was up to 0.35m thick
- 2.5 No cultural material was forthcoming from the ditch, although bulk soils samples were taken from the basal ditch fills (12 and 13) and charcoal samples were recovered from contexts 9, 10 and 12; these have the potential for providing palaeoenvironmental evidence as well as material suitable for radiocarbon dating.



Fig. 4 The excavated section of the ring-ditch in trench 1, viewed from the west.  
Photo CPAT 3292-0016

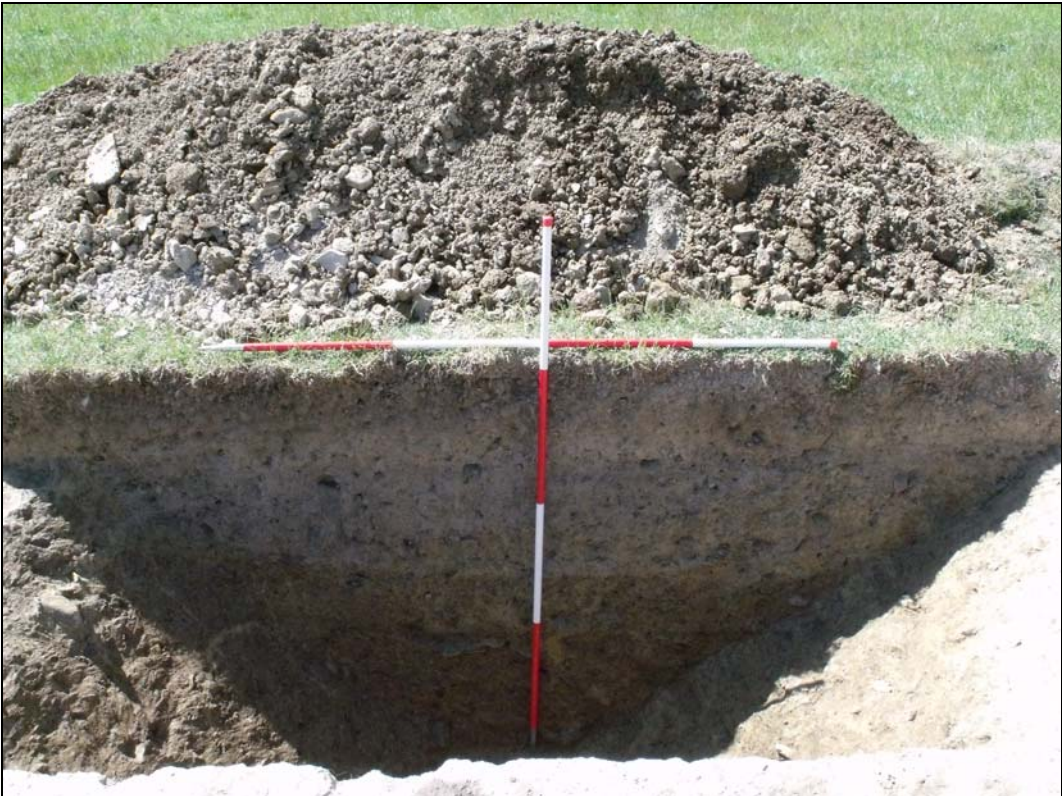


Fig. 5 The section of the ring-ditch in trench 1, viewed from the north.  
Photo CPAT 3292-0011

**Trench 2**

- 2.6 The second trench was located on the west side of the ring-ditch and measured 16m in length. As in Trench 1, the ditch proved difficult to identify during the initial machining, owing in part to the extremely dry ground conditions at the time. Following repeated hand-cleaning a feature (2) was identified, although it was uncertain whether this was a large pit, or the west side of the ring-ditch and limited excavation failed to confirm its nature. With the limited time available the excavation concentrated on the ditch in Trench 1 and no further investigation was undertaken in Trench 2.
- 2.7 Following the comparison of survey data from the excavation with a plot of cropmark evidence for the ring-ditch it became apparent that the position of the feature in Trench 2 matched exactly the location of the western side of the ring-ditch.

**3 CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1 The trial excavations have confirmed the presence of an unusually large ring-ditch around 55m in diameter defined by a single ditch 3.7m wide and around 1.3m deep. Although there was no surviving evidence for the position of the accompanying bank the sequence of infilling observed in the ditch section suggests that this may have been on the interior. The interior of the ring-ditch remains relatively untested as neither trench extended more than 11m from the inner edge of the ditch. It therefore remains to be confirmed whether the ring-ditch functioned as a burial monument, or perhaps had a more ritual function.
- 3.2 The large diameter of the ring-ditch appears to place the site into a category of burial and/or ritual monuments of which other examples have been recognised in the area of the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence, as well as in the Walton Basin in Radnorshire. Excavations in 2009 investigated the largest currently known ring-ditch at Walton Court Farm in the Walton Basin, confirming the presence of a ring-ditch around 100m in diameter with a single ditch 2m wide and 1.4m deep. Radiocarbon dating from hazel charcoal near the base of the ditch has provided a date of 2570-2300 cal. BC (Jones 2010). It is to be hoped that radiocarbon dates will also be forthcoming from the Dyers Hall Farm ring-ditch to provide comparative evidence.

**4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank the following: Richard Hankinson, Wendy Owen and Sophie Watson for assisting with the excavation and survey; Mr Hadyn Jones for allowing access to the site; and Cadw for funding the excavation.

**5 REFERENCES**

Jones, N W, 2010. *Walton Court Farm Ring Ditch. Trial Excavation and survey 2009-10*. CPAT Report No. 1025.