

CPAT Report No 997

Wantyn Dyke near Sarn, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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June 2009

Report for Severn Trent Water

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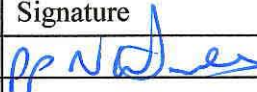


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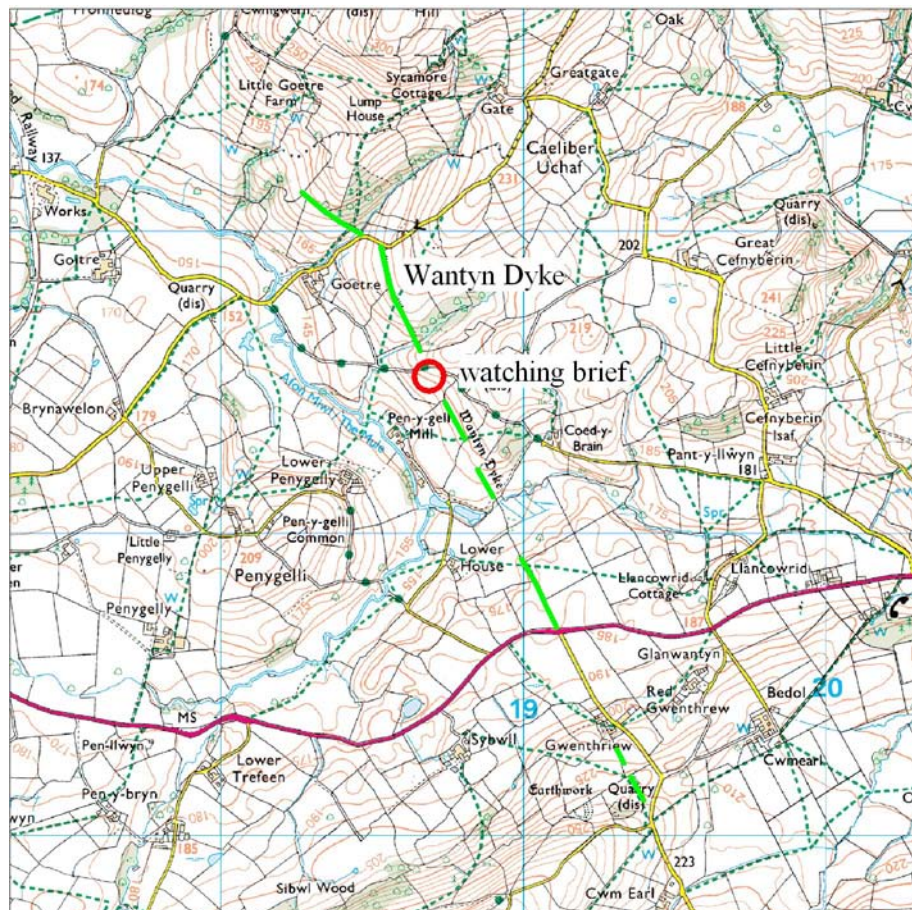
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2009 the Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Heartlands Ltd, on behalf of Severn Trent Water, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the renewal of a watermain between Goetre and Sarn at the point where it crossed the line of an ancient earthwork known as the Wantyn Dyke.
- 1.2 The pipeline crossed the dyke in an area where no visible earthworks survived. Sections of dyke to the north and south, however, are still upstanding and are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Mg208).

2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The section of pipeline observed during the watching brief lies in a field on the south side of a lane, now a bridleway, 1.8km west-north-west of Sarn and 4km south-east of Abermule (Fig. 1; SO 18689154).



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Fig. 1 Watching brief location.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Wantyn Dyke extends for around 3km from SO 18299211, running south-eastwards to SO 19668957. Where there are surviving earthworks along the north-western half of the dyke they generally consist of a scarp or embanked scarp facing downslope to the south-west. Very little of the south-eastern half is now upstanding, although where present the earthworks normally comprise a bank with a probable ditch on the south-western side.
- 3.2 Although the Wantyn Dyke has not been dated by excavation it is thought to be part of a series of similar linear earthworks in the Welsh Marches (Silvester and Hankinson 2002), a number of which have now been scientifically dated to the early medieval period, between the fifth and eighth centuries AD. It is thought unlikely that these dykes were constructed as defensive earthworks and are more likely to have formed boundaries, possibly marking the extents of territories which later became formally recognised under the term *cantref*, which denotes one of the earliest Welsh administrative units (Hankinson and Caseldine 2006, 269).

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was conducted on 21 May 2009, monitoring the excavation by machine of a pipe trench around 0.5m wide and up to 1.4m deep at the point where it crossed the line of the dyke (Fig. 2). A photographic, drawn and written record was maintained which has been deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record.



Fig. 2 Plan of the pipeline crossing the line of the Wantyn Dyke

- 4.2 The watching brief observed the excavation of a 20m length of pipe trench at the position where it crossed the presumed north-west to south-east alignment of the Wantyn Dyke. This lay at the northern, upper end of a field which slopes down steeply to the south.

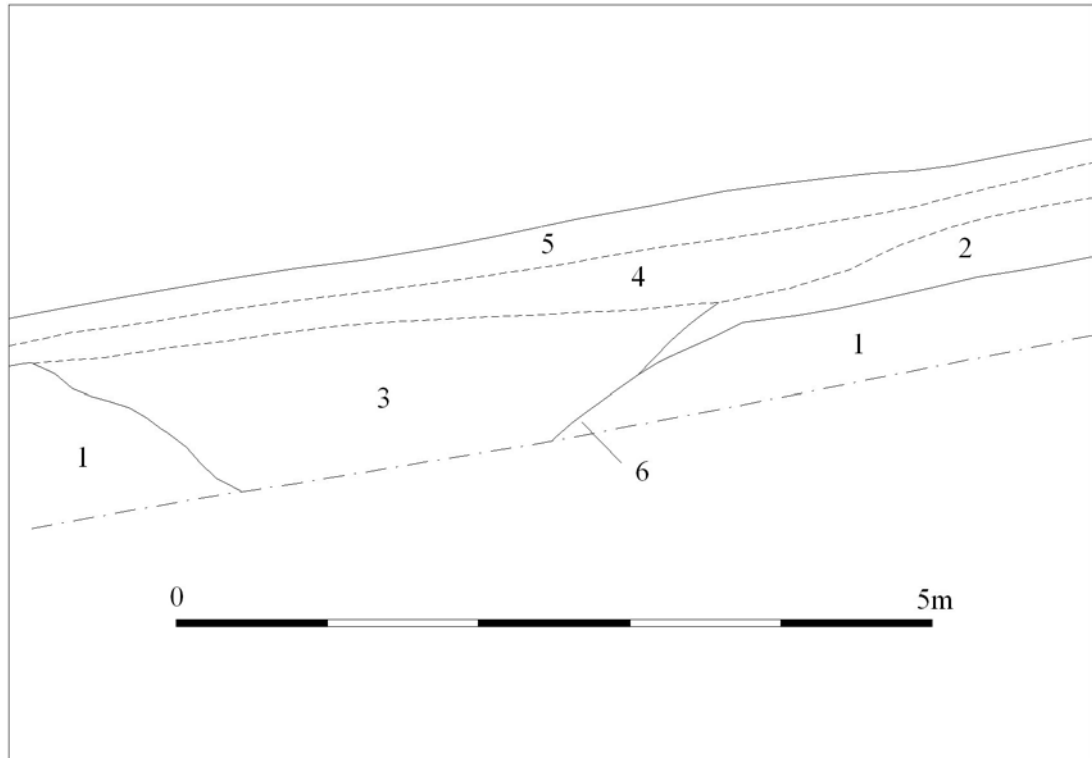


Fig. 3 South-facing section of the ditch exposed in the pipe trench

- 4.3 The watching brief also observed the excavation of two small test pits, one to either side of the dyke alignment, and excavated at a right angle to the northern hedge boundary of the field in order to locate the existing water pipe. This allowed comparison of the soil profiles in areas adjacent to the dyke, although in themselves revealing no deposits of archaeological significance.
- 4.4 The ploughsoil, a dark yellow-brown silty loam (5) *c.* 0.20m thick, overlay a former ploughsoil deposit consisting of a firm yellow-brown clay-silt (4) *c.* 0.20m thick. This lay directly above the undisturbed natural subsoil (2), a very stiff, pale yellow-brown silty clay, *c.* 0.40m thick, containing frequent stones. A lower layer of subsoil was also observed (1), consisting of a pale yellow-brown clay which contained occasional stones.
- 4.5 At a depth of around 0.40 – 0.60m, a sloping-sided ditch (6) was identified cutting into the subsoil at SO 18685 91545 (Figs 3-4). The ditch was *c.* 4.5m wide at the top, narrowing to *c.* 2m at base of pipe trench, which at this point was around 1.4m deep. The base of the ditch was not observed. The ditch was filled by a deposit of firm, yellow-brown silty clay containing very small stones and grit (3).
- 4.6 The soil profiles revealed in the two test pits adjacent to the hedge were very similar to that along most of the pipe trench. The eastern pit, 0.95m deep, located around 10m to the east of ditch 6 revealed a very shallow plough soil *c.* 0.1m deep with old plough soil below, 0.12m deep, overlying the natural subsoil, a stiff silty clay containing small stones. The western pit,

0.58m deep, revealed ploughsoil 0.25m deep, with an old ploughsoil below it, 0.13m thick, again overlying the subsoil.



Fig. 4 South-facing section of the ditch exposed in the pipe trench. The ranging rods indicate the extent of the ditch

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The watching brief has confirmed the existence of subsurface remains associated with the Wantyn Dyke at the point where the pipe trench crossed the line of the dyke. Although there are no visible remains of the dyke, the watching brief identified the upper fill of a ditch around 4.5m wide. There was, however, no evidence for any surviving bank material at this point.
- 5.2 Interestingly, the dyke appears to give little respect to the local topography, its course crossing the slope some 20m below the crest of the hill, rather than occupying a more prominent position further east. This is a feature which is apparent in other dykes, where what appears to be the best route from a defensive perspective is not always followed.
- 5.3 The confirmation that the ditch of the Wantyn Dyke survives at this point provides a welcome and valuable addition to our detailed knowledge of these somewhat enigmatic monuments. It is known that a number of sections were excavated across the Wantyn Dyke in the past, but these

do not appear to have been published in a readily available form, so an accurate section drawing of the ditch is particularly useful for comparative purposes.

- 5.4 In the local area, the nearest dated dyke is that known as the Upper Short Ditch and it can be speculated that the Wantyn Dyke forms part of the same general system (Hankinson and Caseldine 2006, 267). The date obtained for the Upper Short Ditch placed its construction in the 6th or 7th century AD, and close comparison of the excavation records suggest that the ditch of the Wantyn Dyke is of a broadly comparable size and appearance.

6 REFERENCES

Hankinson, R, & Caseldine, A, 2006. Short Dykes in Powys and their origins. *Archaeological Journal* 163, 264-9

Silvester, R. J. and Hankinson, R. 2002. *The Short Dykes of Mid and North-East Wales*, Welshpool: Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust