

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Offa's Dyke, Craig Forda, Oswestry

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 652

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I Grant
October 2004

Report for Mr T Deveson and Miss K Hidden

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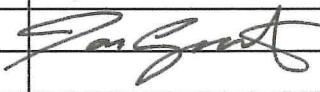


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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The watching brief, which forms the subject of this report, was undertaken during the excavation of footings for a building extension to Craig Forda, The Old Racecourse, Oswestry. The site lies along the course of Offa's Dyke which is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979.
- 1.2 Although the plot in question does not fall within the bounds of the existing scheduled area the potential archaeological interest led to a condition being attached to the planning application (03/12984/FUL). A brief prepared by Shropshire County Council's Historic Environment Officer required appropriate archaeological monitoring to be undertaken of all groundworks associated with the proposed development. The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was approached by Mr T. Deveson and Miss K. Hidden, of Craig Forda, to undertake the required watching brief, and this was carried out in July 2004.

2 LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is situated on the upper western slopes of Craig Forda (SJ 25603050), a ridgeline of carboniferous sandstone, and limestone that dominates the surrounding countryside above Llawnt, to the north, and Oswestry to the east (Fig. 1). Offa's Dyke runs north to south along the line of this ridge and Cyril Fox (1955) noted in his fieldstudy of 1928 that in the fields to the north of the proposed development plot (field nos 35 and 36 in his report):

'... the Dyke forms a grassy bank of normal character ditched on the lower (W.) side ,and some-what damaged by man and rabbits; it has now reached the westward-facing flank of the Morda valley and the views to the W. are very extensive. Utilizing the outcrop of rock (on which a cottage stands), the Dyke proceeds, at the level of the rock crest, through a plantation as a berm or platform on the steep hill-side usually with a low bank on the W....The platform above referred to is present on the hill scarp for a distance of 600 yards at a constant level below the 1,000-ft. contour.'

- 2.2 The cottage to which Fox refers to is the 'Craig Forda' of that name and his annotated version of the 6" First Edition O.S map, (Fig. 4) clearly shows the dwelling and associated outbuildings partly built over the projected line of Offa's Dyke. What is also evident is a trackway, running west to east, that ascends from the woods below the cottage, up through a gap in the dyke and onto the heights above Craig Forda. The significance of this trackway in relation to the impact upon the development groundworks is expanded upon later in the text of this report.

3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 All of the proposed excavations that were to fall within the designated area were carried out using a machine excavator and were monitored over a period of two days, 12th and 13th July 2004. The groundworks included the partial demolition of an existing lime-mortared, stone retaining wall and the removal of any associated foundation material. The wall, possibly of early 19th-century origin, was an integral part of the north-west wing of the cottage and lay abreast the projected alignment of Offa's Dyke (Fig. 3, Plate 1).
- 3.2 The removal of the northern end of the wall and its associated buttress (0.7m in width) revealed extensive stone footings that extended to a depth of 1.6m. Once this material was removed, the post-medieval deposits visible in the south-east facing section (Plate 3) clearly illustrated that the width of the original foundation cut extended westwards across the projected line of the dyke. The recorded section revealed a dark brown sandy topsoil (0.3m in depth) with an underlying uniform

deposit of light brown sandy clay (1.3m in depth), containing fragments of roofing slate, sandstone, mortar and other 19th-century building debris, all of which had been used to backfill the original construction trench. Shattered limestone bedrock was recorded in situ at the base of the trench. The excavation of this trench (0.7m in width) continued north-east for a further 1.9m before returning along the outer face of the original wall, south-east, for 4.1m and to a depth of 1.5m. The exposed face of the lime mortared wall survived to a depth of 1.4m, with an underlying drystone construction up to 0.1m in depth built onto bedrock. In addition, the bedrock had a tendency to shatter into blocks creating a quarried-out effect across the base of the trench, sometimes also resembling crude drystone building construction in situ.

- 3.3 The south-west facing section of this trench revealed that the area north of the development consisted entirely of made-up ground (Plate 2), redeposited during the 19th century. At the base were the remains of footings for a wall, the average size of the blocks being 0.10m x 0.17m x 0.20m and of drystone construction (Plate 4). In addition, fragments of 18th-century slipware were recovered from within the associated deposits. The feature was sealed by a rubble deposit of fragmented pinkish sandstone and a dark brown organic rich silty clay. Although the true nature of the feature cannot be ascertained it is quite possible that the footings are the remains of an outbuilding that predate the existing cottage. The remaining overlying deposits (1.0m in depth) consisted of green shale, gravel, mortar fragments, charcoal and brown sandy clay, all of which was capped by a layer of yellow clay which in turn was sealed by a mixed overburden of loose dark brown silts and general building debris.
- 3.4 The excavation of the building footings continued, as outlined in Fig. 3, to depths of no more than 1.0m. Throughout this process all of the deposits that were removed resembled the general overburden previously recorded across the site. Furthermore, no further remains of structural features were identified in situ.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The results of the watching brief indicate that there are no surviving elements of Offa's Dyke that fall within the bounds of the proposed development area at Craig Forda. The limestone outcrop that the cottage is constructed upon is the only indicator of the projected alignment of the Dyke at this point. Furthermore it would appear that prior to the construction of the present cottage in the mid 19th-century, the area was re-landscaped/ backfilled with large deposits of varying material, the redeposited clays probably being obtained from the cutting south-east of the cottage. All of the building footings, which have been the subject of the watching brief, have been excavated through and onto these deposits.
- 4.2 Fox's annotated version of the 6" First Edition O.S map (Fig. 4) indicates that a trackway/holloway approached the cottage from the south-west, traversing the dyke possibly through a gap and into the outer yard of the cottage. The trackway may well predate the cottage and could be a byway onto the upper slopes of Craig Forda. The remains of wall footings, and in particular the well-dressed wall referred to in section 3.2, indicate that the original ground level was at least 1.4m below the present ground horizon. At some point in time the area north of the cottage has been further backfilled and subsequently levelled prior to the construction of the present day outbuildings, the process effectively burying the trackway.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Richard Hankinson, Nigel Jones and Bob Silvester, CPAT; Mr Toby Deveson and Miss Kate Hidden, Craig Forda; Mike Watson, Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council; and Ken Price and the site staff of D.C.C. Farr Building Contractors

6 REFERENCES

Published 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: British Academy/Oxford University Press.

Cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6"

APPENDIX 1
PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site archive

- 1 black and white negative film
- 1 colour print film
- 1 colour slide film
- 3 Watching brief daily visit forms
- 1 copy of the architects proposed 'Ground Floor Plan'
- Specification, brief and correspondence

APPENDIX 2

**CRAIG FORDA, OSWESTRY
SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been approached to provide a specification for undertaking a watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Craig Forda, The Old Racecourse, Oswestry, Shropshire.
- 1.2 The site lies along the course Offa's Dyke (SJ 25603050), which at this point is partly built over by the existing dwelling. As a result of the potential archaeological interest a condition has been attached to the planning permission for the extension (03/12984/FUL) to require appropriate archaeological works to be undertaken in response to a brief prepared by Shropshire County Council's Historic Environment Officer. The requirements of the brief are that all ground works associated with the proposed development shall be carried out under archaeological supervision.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
 - 2.1.1 to record any archaeological features identified during the archaeological monitoring of groundworks;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the watching brief.

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will be undertaken to include: the archaeological supervision of groundworks; appropriate archaeological excavation and recording of any significant features or deposits which may be revealed.
- 3.2 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be recorded and, where appropriate, excavated by hand and recorded on individual record forms and by drawn section/plan and/or photography. All plans and sections will be drawn at an appropriate scale of either 1:50, 1:20 or 1:10 and photography will be in 35mm format black and white negative and colour slide. All features identified will be tied in locationally to points which are identifiable on modern Ordnance Survey mapping and to Ordnance datum where possible.
- 3.3 All artefacts will be related to their contexts from which they were derived and treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and will be processed by trained CPAT staff. Where appropriate, samples will be taken for environmental and technological evidence.
- 3.4 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared in A4 format, containing conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Archaeological Background; Evaluation; Conclusions and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991). The archive will be ordered, catalogued, labelled and stored according to UKIC Guidelines. The project will be presented to an appropriate museum within 12 months.

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by an experienced field archaeologist and overall supervision will be by Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The duration of the watching brief will be entirely determined by the contractor's programme of work. The curator will be informed of the programme to enable monitoring of the works if required.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the fieldwork.
- 4.3 Copies of the report will be deposited with the client within one month of the completion of on-site works.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W. Jones
1st April 2004

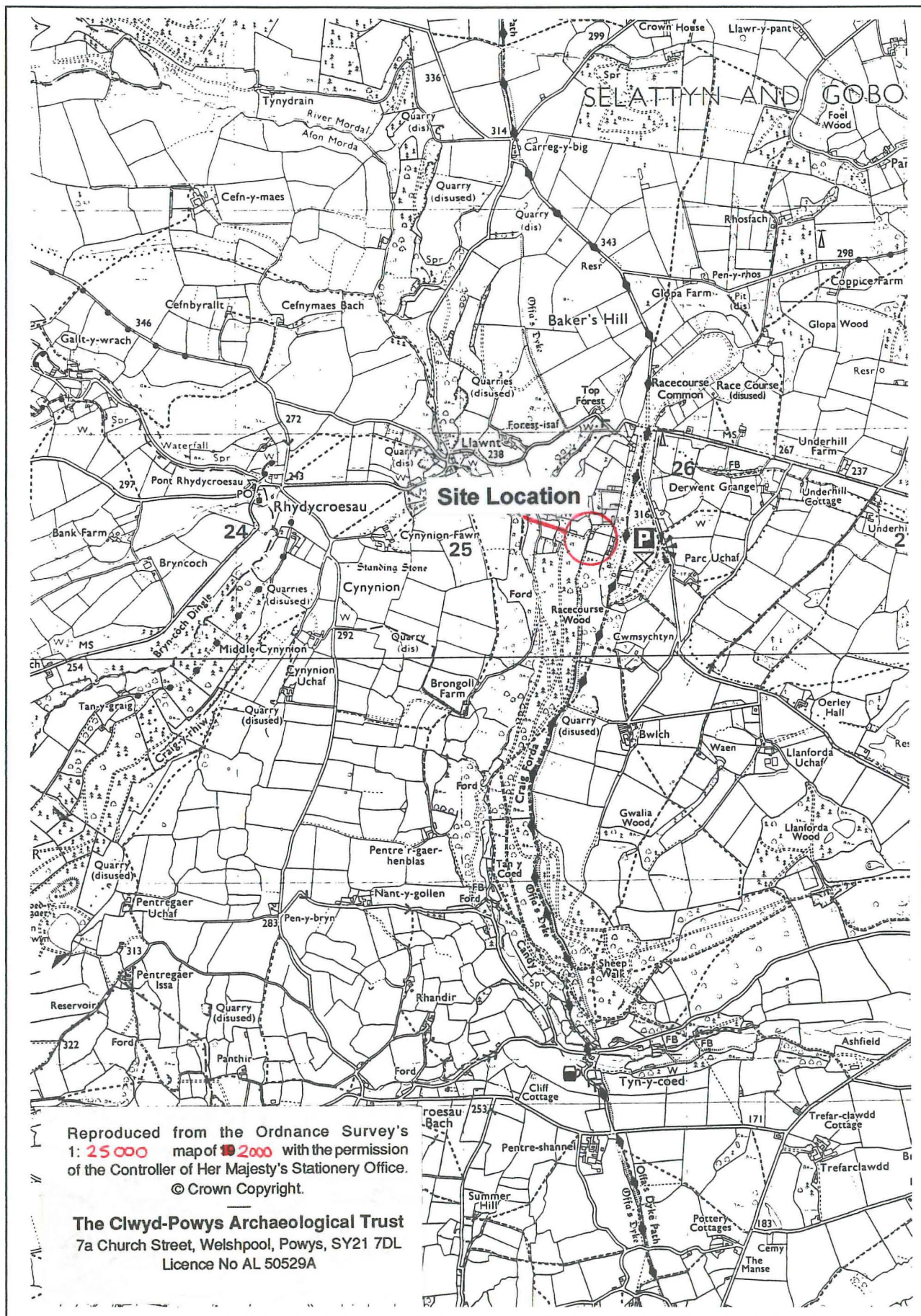


Fig. 1 Site Location OS 1:25 000

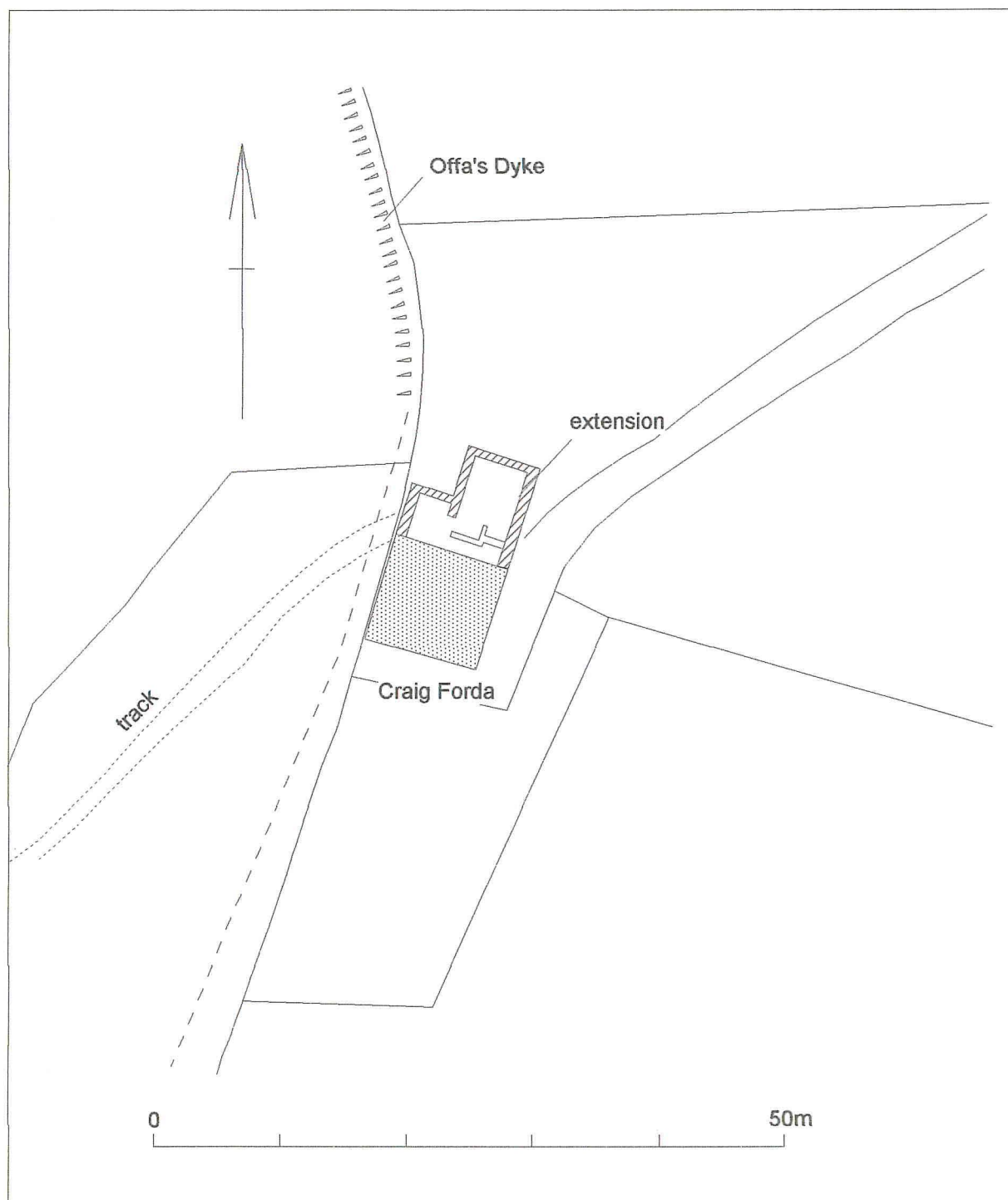


Fig. 2 Location, scale 1:500

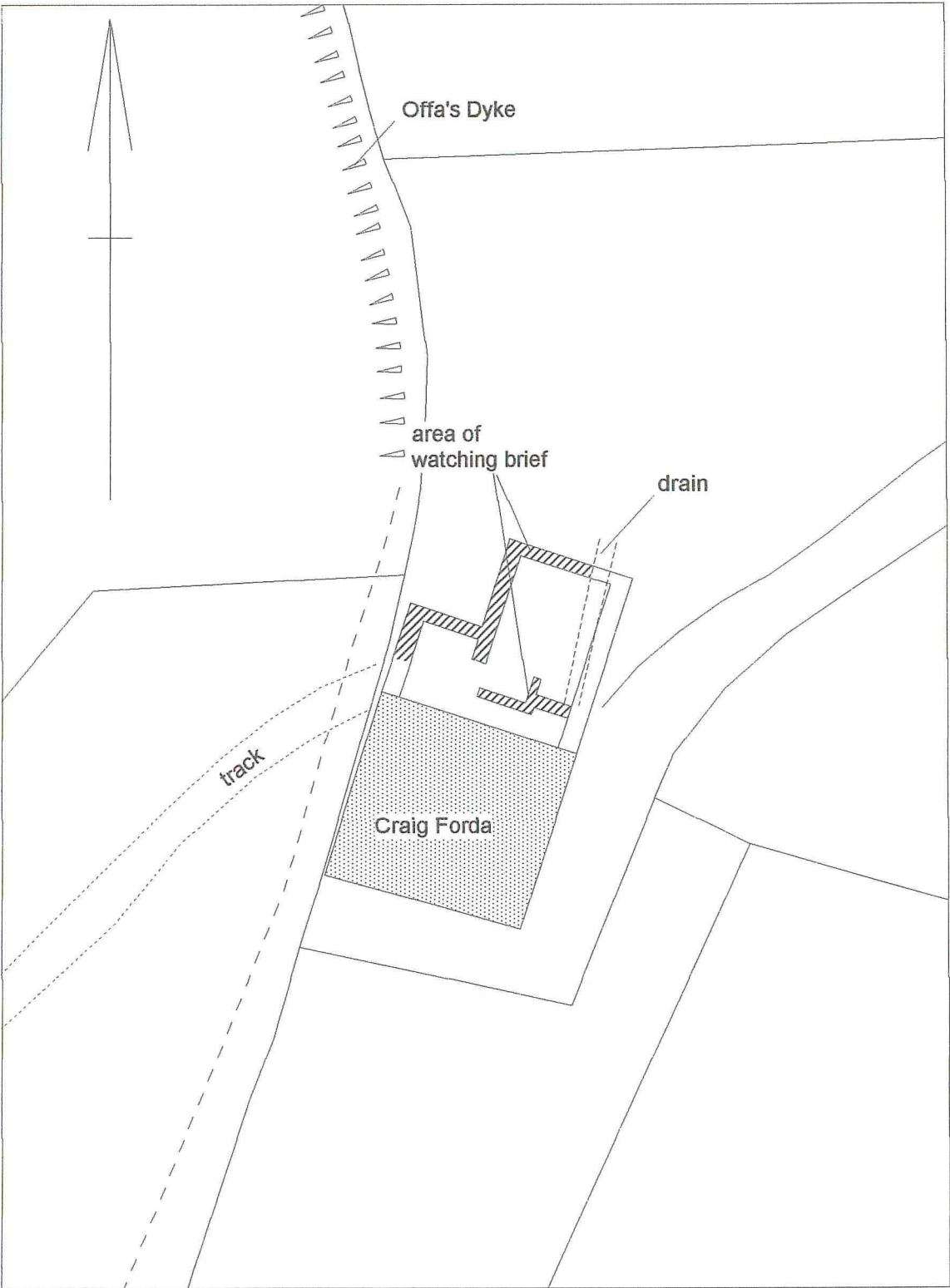


Fig. 3 Watching brief, scale 1:200

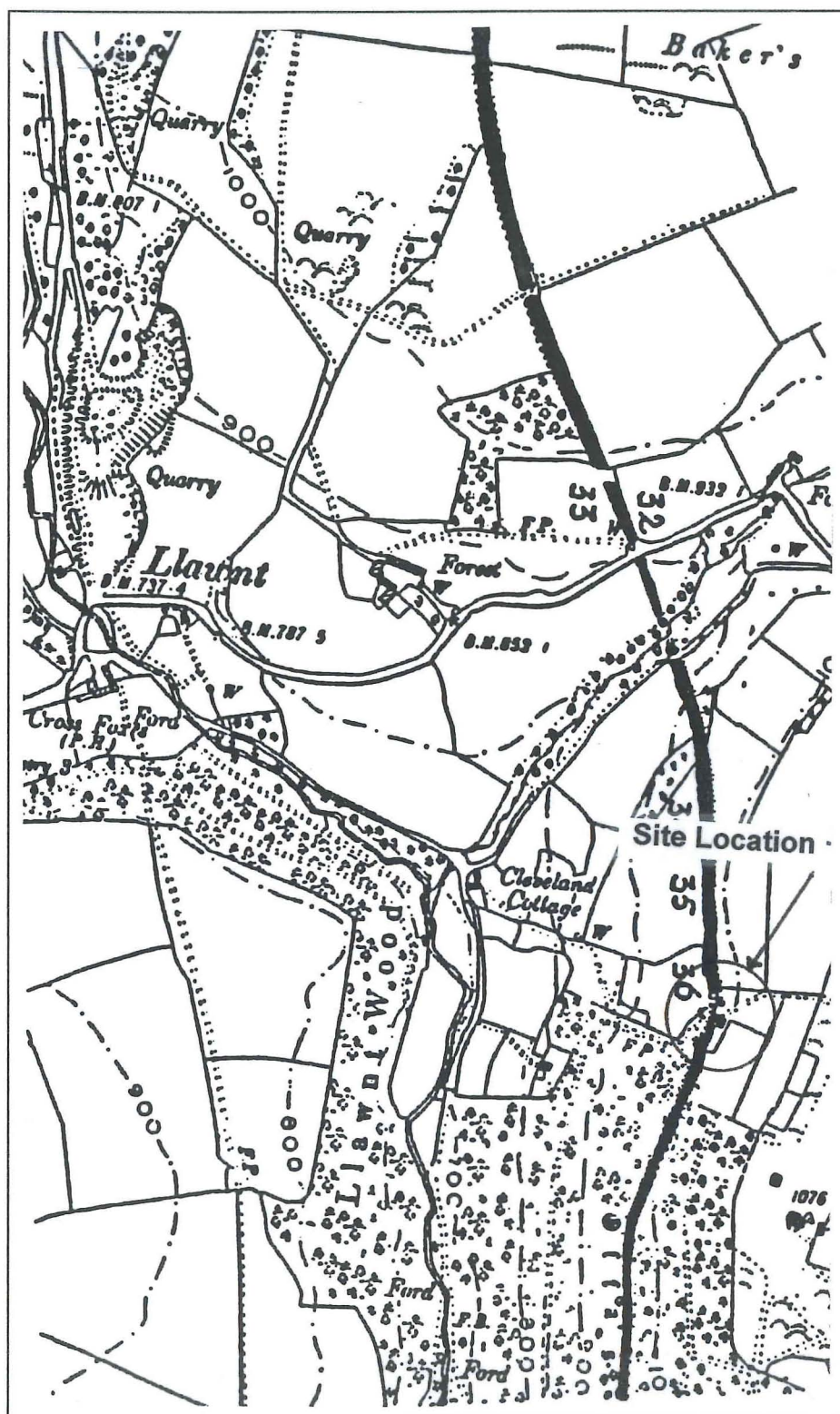


Fig. 4 Annotated version of the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6", taken from C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke, a field survey of the western frontier-works of Mercia in the seventh and eighth centuries AD.* (1955), Fig 25, with all due acknowledgments.



Plate 1. Craig Forda from the east, showing location of excavations. The line of Offa's Dyke is projected north to south underlying the part-demolished retaining wall. Photo CPAT 1715.23



Plate 2. View from the south-east, showing footings excavated through 19th Century levelling deposits. The upstanding wall is along the projected line of Offa's Dyke. Photo CPAT 1714.04



Plate 3. View from the east, showing 19th century retaining wall and backfill deposits.
Photo CPAT 1715.18

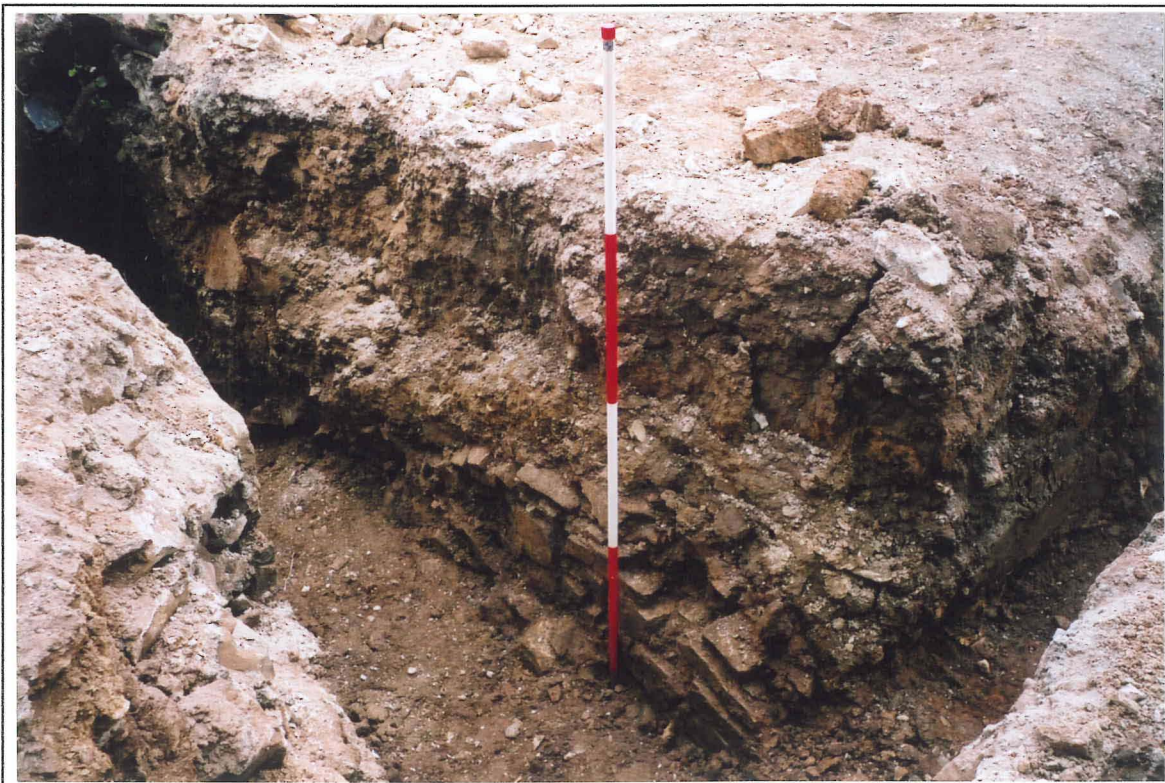


Plate 4. View from the south-east showing excavations through 19th century levelling material and the remains of footings to a wall. Photo CPAT 1715.22