

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

**Wat's Dyke, Maes-y-Clawdd Industrial Estate
Oswestry, Shropshire
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**



CPAT Report No 721

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Oswestry, Shropshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

I Grant
June 2005

Report for Dennis Edwards Ltd


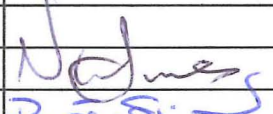

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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The watching brief, which forms the subject of this report, was undertaken during the process of topsoil stripping and grading of land adjacent to Maes-y-Clawdd road, on the Maes-y-Clawdd Industrial Estate in Oswestry, Shropshire. The site lies on the course of the Early Medieval earthwork known as Wat's Dyke, which is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979 (SMR No. SA1001).
- 1.2 Although the plot in question does not fall within the bounds of the existing scheduled area, the archaeological potential of the area led to a condition being attached to the planning application (05/13673/FUL). A brief prepared by Shropshire County Council's Historic Environment Officer required appropriate archaeological monitoring to be undertaken on all groundworks associated with the proposed development that fell within an area of archaeological significance which was defined as a twenty-metre wide zone along the western edge of the site. The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was approached by Dennis Edwards Ltd (Developments) to undertake the required watching brief, and this was carried out on the 20th June 2005.

2 LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is located two kilometres south-east of the town of Oswestry (see Fig. 1; SJ 3005 2800) at the junction of Maesbury Road and Maes-y-Clawdd. The western edge of the site lies along the projected line of Wat's Dyke which is a linear earthwork running intermittently for approximately 65km from the River Morda at Maesbrook, near Oswestry, to Basingwerk on the Dee Estuary in Flintshire.
- 2.2 The earthwork consists of a bank with a ditch on its west side and it makes full use, where possible, of the natural drainage and topography in the locality to present a barrier to the west. The Dyke, therefore, may well have formed the western boundary or frontier of a territory which must have included the eastern part of Flintshire, north-west Shropshire and west Cheshire at least (Hannaford 1998). The dating of the Dyke is uncertain. In the past it was generally thought to date to the 8th century AD, predating the other great earthwork, Offa's Dyke, which lay further to the west. However, more recent excavations undertaken south of Maes-y-Clawdd (Hannaford 1998; see Fig. 2) produced a radiocarbon date from material buried beneath the earthwork which suggests that a 5th-century date for the construction of Wat's Dyke could be a possibility. It is conceivable, however, that the date was produced from a deposit which simply pre-dates the Dyke by an unknown length of time and therefore provides only a date after which the earthwork was constructed.

3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 The total area that was machine excavated within the assigned corridor was 54m by 14.2m, the width increasing to 18.5m at the north end of the site. This corridor was bounded on the western side by the Maesbury Road and the remains of a hedgerow. To the south is the Maes-y-Clawdd road and the proposed development area lies immediately to the east. A hedgerow and fence-line, beyond which lies an embankment believed to be the remains of Wat's Dyke, delineates the northern bounds of the site. Before work commenced there was no visible evidence of the alignment of the dyke within the development corridor.
- 3.2 Work commenced at the southern end of the corridor, removing topsoil and subsequently grading down the ground by no more than 200mm at any point across the site (see Plate 1). The overburden deposit (context 01) consisted of dark-brown silty clay mixed with redeposited natural subsoil clay. The deposit contained numerous quantities of late 19th- and 20th-century

ceramics. All of this material was removed to a pre-designated area that lay beyond the bounds of the corridor but still within the development site compound.

- 3.3 Removal of this deposit revealed a mixed clay and gravel deposit (context 02) forming a slightly raised ridge on a north-north-west to south-south-east alignment (see Fig. 3 and Plate 2). This deposit had a width of 4.5m at the southern end of the site and this was maintained for approximately 30m until a large area of disturbance in the northern sector reduced the deposit to a width of between 2m to 3m.
- 3.4 The area of disturbance consisted of a dark brown clay-silt deposit (context 05), containing 19th- and 20th-century artefacts, through which two large pits (contexts 03 and 04) had been cut. The more southerly pit (03), located 19m south of the northern boundary, was 4.5m in diameter. A further 2.5m to the north was the second feature (context 04), a rectangular pit, 6m in length and 3m in width, orientated north-west to south-east. Both features were filled by a deposit of dark brown silty-clay.
- 3.5 The linear deposit of clay and gravel (context 02), which was considered to be the possible remains of in-situ dyke material, was delineated along the whole of the eastern side by a well-defined linear feature (context 08). A section was excavated through the feature (see Fig. 3 and Plate 3) revealing a linear field drain of late 18th- to 19th- century date, 1.1m in width and 0.18m in depth. In some areas the feature was sealed by a deposit of redeposited natural clay. The clay and gravel deposit (02) was evident in the base and sides of the drain, demonstrating that part of the dyke probably survived *in situ* to the east (below the 200mm level reached by the grading process).
- 3.6 To the west of deposit 02 was a fine dark brown silt deposit, of 19th-century origin (context 09). At a point parallel to the section excavated across the field drain (08) a small excavation was made by hand through deposit 09 (see Fig. 3 and Plate 4). This revealed, in section, the edge of the ditch along the western side of the Dyke observed as a gradient profile that sloped downwards quite sharply from east to west. The deposit 09 sealed a deposit of fragmented 19th-century brick together with numerous corroded iron objects. Underlying this layer was a deposit of fine light grey silty clay that contained flecks of charcoal. Although undated, this deposit probably represents one of the earlier uppermost levelling deposits contained within the ditch.
- 3.7 Two other linear features (contexts 06 and 07) were observed, both of which traversed the area from north-west to south-east. Feature 07, 1m in width, crossed the dyke at a point 8m north of the southern bounds of the site. The second feature (06), 1.8m in width, crossed the dyke a further 9m north of feature 07. Both features truncated the late deposits, 08 and 09, together with a further deposit (context 10), to the east (see Fig.3).

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The results of the watching brief indicate that the linear band of gravel and clay (context 02) that traverses the site from north-west to south east is probably all that now remains of the lower bank materials of Wat's Dyke. The nature of the overlying deposits suggests that during the 20th century the site had been graded down to a level horizon and further levelling material imported and spread across the site.
- 4.2 With reference to the excavations undertaken by Hannaford (1997), and in the absence of positive dating evidence to prove otherwise, the material underlying the deposit 09, revealed along the western edge of the site, can be interpreted as surviving silt lying within the preserved line of the dyke ditch.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones and Bob Silvester, CPAT; Mr Dennis Edwards, Dennis Edwards Ltd; and Mr Mike Watson, Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.

6 REFERENCES

Published Sources

Hannaford H R, 1998. (An Excavation on Wat's Dyke at Mile Oak, Oswestry, Shropshire.)
Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society, Vol 73, 01-07

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site archive

1 black and white negative film

1 colour slide film

Digital images

Watching brief daily visit form

Specification, brief and correspondence

APPENDIX 2

LAND AT MAES-Y-CLAWDD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, OSWESTRY, SHROPSHIRE 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 invited to prepare a specification for undertaking an archaeological watching brief in connection with proposals for the construction of a new industrial unit and car parking on land at Maes-y-Clawdd Industrial Estate, Oswestry, Shropshire. A brief for the required archaeological works has been produced by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.
- 1.2 The site in question is located 2km SE of Oswestry town centre (SJ 30052880) and along the western edge of the development is a 55m length of the course of Wat's Dyke, a linear earthwork believed to be of Post-Roman or Anglo-Saxon date. As a result, a 20m wide strip along the western edge is believed to have significant archaeological potential and ground disturbance in this area has been restricted to a maximum of 200mm which should not be exceeded without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
 - 2.1.1 to record any archaeological features identified during the archaeological monitoring of groundworks within the 20m-wide strip along the western edge of the plot to ensure their preservation by record;
 - 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 all relevant groundworks and 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 by drawn section/plan and/or photography. Individual contexts will be recorded on separate context sheets within a context register. Plans will be drawn at a scale of 1:50 or 1:20 and sections at 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate. All 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.
- 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 in accordance with the guidelines set out in the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation's *Conservation Guidelines No. 2*. Contingency sums have been included to allow for the processing of environmental, technical or dating evidence.
- 3.4 The on-site contractors are required to allow sufficient opportunity for appropriate archaeological excavation and recording to be undertaken. Every effort will be made to minimise any disruption to the overall scheme of works.

- 3.5 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared. This will be in A4 format and contain, as necessary, conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Watching Brief; Conclusions and References, together with any appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.6 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 deposited with an appropriate body within 12 months following any necessary agreement with the site owner. The Curator of Archaeology will be contacted prior to commencement to discuss the archive deposition.

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.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the fieldwork.
- 4.3 A draft report will be sent to the Historic Environment Officer prior to completion of the final report. Copies of the final report will be deposited with the client, the Historic Environment Officer and the County SMR within two weeks of the completion of on-site works.
- 4.4 The Historic Environment Officer will be contacted when appropriate to arrange for monitoring of the works, if required. A contingency of £100 per visit has been allowed.
- 4.5 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.6 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W. Jones
3 June 2005



Fig. 1 Site Location OS 1:25 000

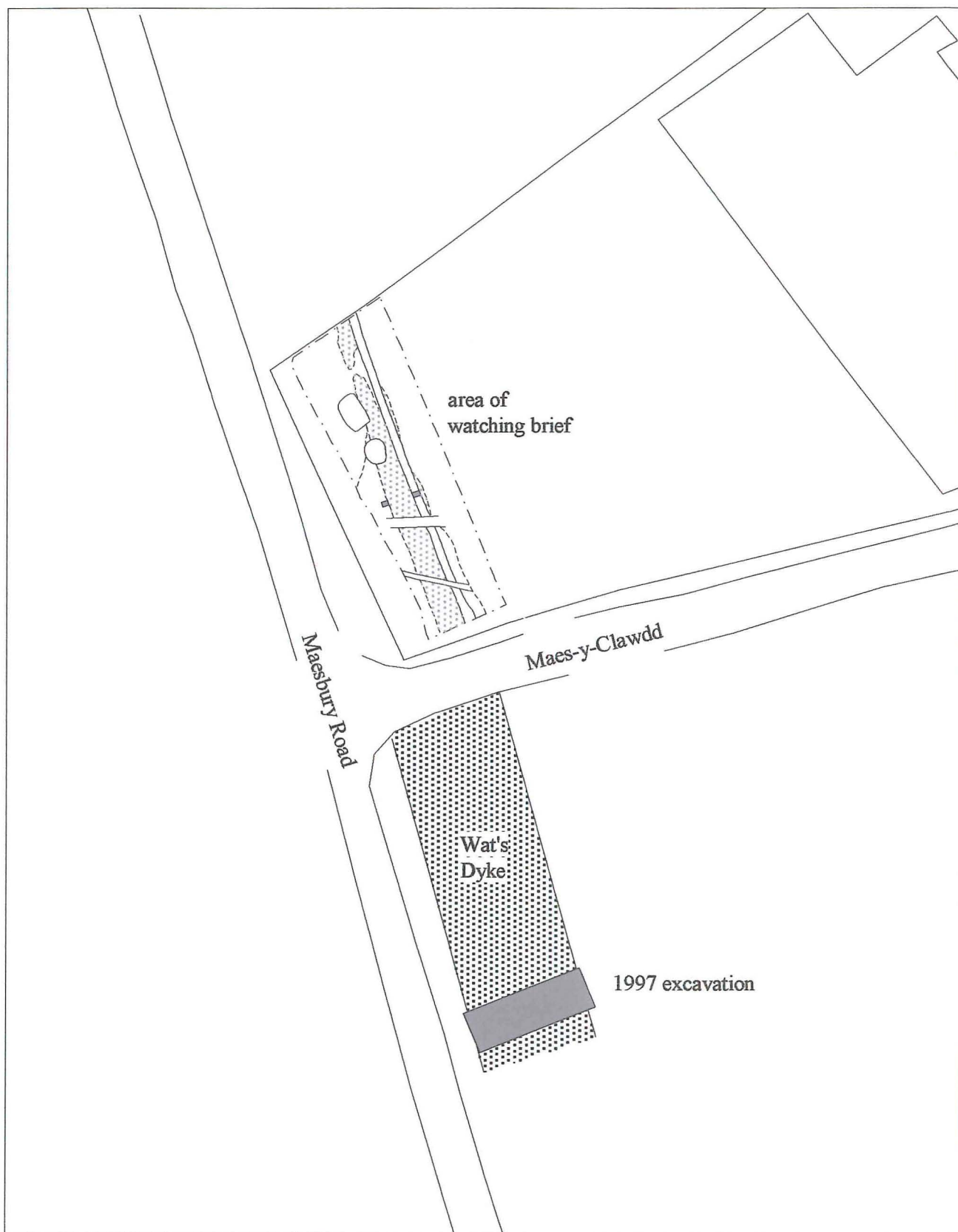


Fig. 2 Site location, scale 1:1,000

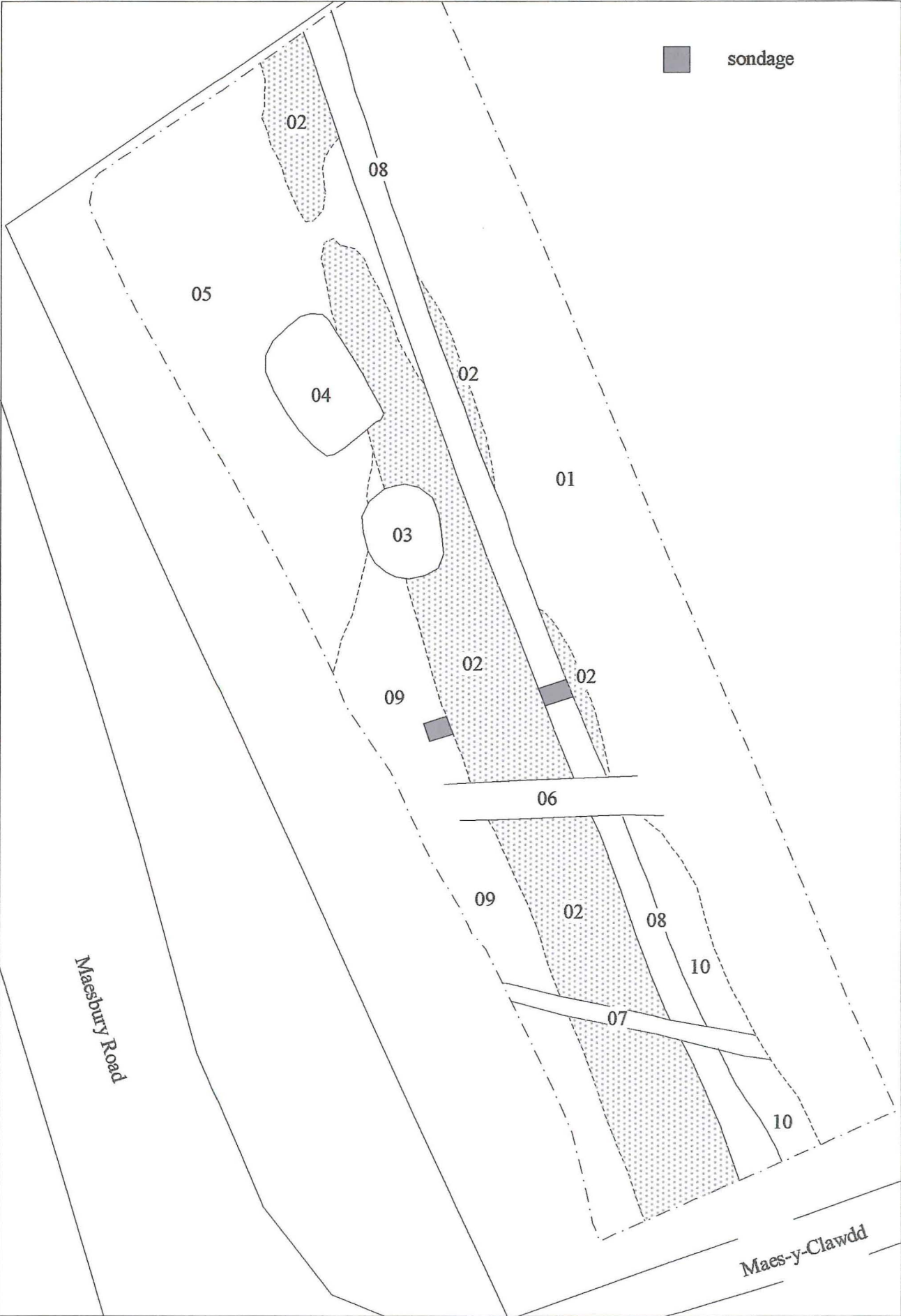


Fig. 3 Area of watching brief, scale 1:250

Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey Revised edition of 1928, 6" Shropshire 19 NW, originally surveyed 1873-74



Plate 1. General site view looking north-west during topsoil removal. Photo CPAT 1939.02



Plate 2. General view looking north illustrating *insitu* Dyke material (02) (flanked by the surveying poles). Photo CPAT 1939.05



Plate 3. South facing section through late 18th/19th century field drain (08). Photo CPAT 1939.07

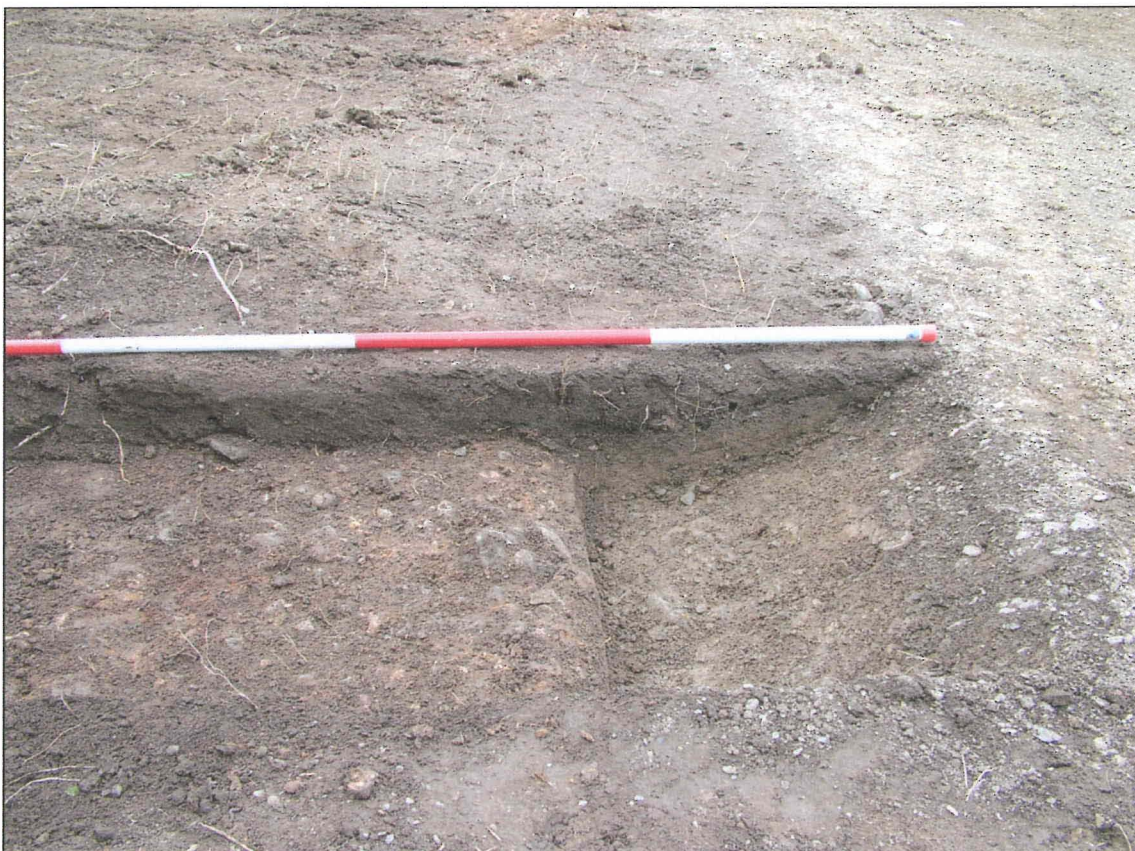


Plate 4. South facing sondage through dyke ditch fill (09). Photo CPAT 1939.10