THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Montgomery Canal, Redwith, Shropshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 883

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Report for D G Mills Haulage on behalf of British Waterways

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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

CPAT Report Title Montgomery Canal Restoration, Redwith, Shropshire: Archaeological Watching Brief			
CPAT Project Name	Montgomery Canal, Redwith		
CPAT Project No	1465	CPAT Report No 883	
Confidential (yes/no)	Yes	Interim/draft/final Final	

Internal control

	name	Signature	date
prepared by	R. Hankinson	Ame	1518107
checked by	N.W. Jones	Distres	15/8/07
approved by	R. J. Silvester	Rois	15/05/07

Revisions						
no	date	made by	checked by	approved by		

Internal memo		

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2007 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, hereafter CPAT, was invited by D G Mills Haulage of Llanfyllin to undertake an archaeological watching brief in connection with the restoration of a section of the Montgomery Canal at Redwith in Shropshire. The work being carried out on behalf of British Waterways. The section of canal in question runs between Redwith Bridge (SJ 301241) and Gronwen Bridge (SJ 304246), approximately 5km to the south of Oswestry.
- 1.2 Archaeological excavations had been carried out in the area by CPAT in 1996 (Owen 1996), in order to determine whether any evidence of the course of Wat's Dyke, an early medieval earthwork, existed in the immediate vicinity of this section of the canal. Cropmark evidence (see Plate 1) of the alignment of Wat's Dyke revealed that it had been crossed by the canal, but the excavations did not reveal any conclusive evidence of the dyke.



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Fig. 1 Location of watching brief

1.3 The requirement for a watching brief was determined by Mr S Lees of British Waterways, acting in his capacity as the project manager for the canal restoration, and approval of the watching brief methodology was granted by Mr M Watson, the Historic Environment Officer of Shropshire County Council.

- 1.4 Although the programme of works was not subject to a design brief, the details of the work were laid out in the specification for the watching brief, which was supplied to British Waterways by CPAT and met the requirements of the approved methodology.
- 1.5 The initial visit to the site was carried out on 17th May 2007, when a trench was being excavated to install sheet metal piling in the eastern bank of the canal. A subsequent visit, on 13th August 2007, examined the excavations which had taken place to facilitate the installation of a new clay liner in the eastern part of the bed of the canal.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Wat's Dyke is a linear earthwork which stretches intermittently for approximately 60km from the River Morda at Maesbury in Shropshire to the Dee Estuary at Holywell in Flintshire. The earthwork consists of a bank with a ditch on its west side, presenting a barrier to the west. The function and even the dating of the Dyke are uncertain, but it is usually held to be a boundary dyke dating to the 8th century AD, in the period predating Offa's Dyke. The dyke probably functioned as a demarcation between Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and Wales in the Early Medieval period.



Plate 1 Cropmark evidence of Wat's Dyke, running from bottom left to top right of the photograph, where it meets the course of the canal (Photo CPAT 79-14-29)

2.2 Historically known as the Shropshire Union Canal and subsequently as the Montgomeryshire Canal (Hughes 1988), the now-named Montgomery Canal runs for approximately 53km from its junction with the Llangollen Canal in Shropshire to Newtown in what was Montgomeryshire, a county now subsumed in modern Powys. The majority of the canal (c. 36km) lies within Powys, with the remaining section (c. 17km) within Shropshire. Between 1794 and 1821, the waterway was constructed in stages to create the unified structure that is known as the Montgomery Canal today. The canal originally consisted of four distinct schemes, which have only been linked together in name under modern ownership; three of these lengths were originally constructed to carry and distribute lime for agricultural purposes from the Llanymynech Quarries (Hughes 1988, 9).

- 2.4 Following the abandonment of the canal as a waterway in more recent times, many sections have been cut by later infrastructure developments and are no longer navigable, and this is highlighted by the canal basin at its terminus in Newtown, which is now partially occupied by a housing development. The reinstatement as a waterway of the section of the Montgomery Canal described in this report, forms part of a larger programme of canal restoration planned by British Waterways to reopen the canal for navigation.
- 2.5 The area of the watching brief is crossed from south to north by Wat's Dyke, and it has been argued convincingly that, for two or three hundred metres to the south of the Croft's Mill bridge (SJ 30472486), the canal bank and towpath have physically adopted the line of the dyke, which could perhaps still be seen as an earthwork at the time of the canal's construction.

3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 The initial visit to the site was carried out on 17th May 2007, during the installation of sheet metal pilings into the eastern bank of the canal to the south of Gronwen Bridge, at the approximate point (SJ 30432453) where it is crossed by the line of Wat's Dyke. The installation of pilings involved the excavation of a trench in the south-eastern bank of the canal, and a length of approximately 250m of this trench was visually examined, commencing approximately 20m to the south of Gronwen Bridge.
- 3.2 No evidence of Wat's Dyke was revealed in the trench, which crossed both of the putative alignments mentioned by Owen in 1996, but the opportunity was taken to make a brief photographic record of a stone revetment wall which was revealed in the south-eastern bank of the canal (see Plate 2, below). The revetment was probably an original feature which had been installed to protect the canal bank from erosion by wave action.



Plate 2 A section of the limestone rubble revetment wall in the south-eastern bank of the canal (Photo CPAT 2365-001)

3.3 The second visit examined the machined surface of the base of the canal, which was designed to restore its original profile prior to the installation of a new clay lining. The soils that were revealed were carefully examined for evidence of either the bank or ditch of Wat's Dyke, but neither of these features was apparent. It appeared that the visible deposits were related to the construction of the canal bank and its old clay lining, and that no trace of the earlier earthworks was evident.



Plate 3 The relevant section of the canal, after its profile had been restored (Photo CPAT 2365-005)

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Examination of the aerial photographic evidence (*Plate 1*) confirms that the alignment of Wat's Dyke does coincide with this section of the canal, although the monument is not now readily apparent as an earthwork in this locality, due mainly to past erosion and land improvement.
- 4.2 No evidence of sub-surface features related to Wat's Dyke was revealed by the watching brief, although it is possible that some may survive at a greater depth below the canal bank than was excavated during the restoration work. It is perhaps more likely that any evidence of the dyke which existed in this area was removed at the time the canal was constructed.
- 4.3 Some information was forthcoming on the structure of the canal itself, for a limestone rubble revetment wall had been built into the south-east bank of the canal at the approximate level of the waterline. The wall was probably installed to protect the canal bank from wave erosion, which would have been a significant threat to the integrity of the waterway, given its height of approximately 3m above the adjoining land surface.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

5.1 The writer would like to thank Mr S Lees of British Waterways and Mr J Glyn, the site agent/manager for D G Mills Haulage, for facilitating the watching brief.

6 **REFERENCES**

- Jones, N W, Silvester, R J, & Britnell, W J, 2003, Montgomery Canal Conservation Management Strategy, Welshpool: CPAT Report No 550
- Owen, W G, 1996, Montgomery Canal Restoration: Phase 3, Redwith, Shropshire, Welshpool: CPAT Report No 168.1

APPENDIX 1

SPECIFICATION

MONTGOMERY CANAL RESTORATION: GRONWEN BRIDGE TO REDWITH BRIDGE SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited to undertake an archaeological watching brief on behalf of British Waterways, in connection with the restoration of the Montgomery Canal. The section in question is between Gronwen Bridge and Redwith Bridge (SJ 30452464 to SJ 30092414) which, at the northern end (SJ 30432453), may impact on the line of Wat's Dyke.
- 1.2 The proposed works are relatively minor, involving excavation and dredging to restore the original canal profile and it is not anticipated that any works will extend beneath the original base of the canal. On the eastern it is intended to excavate up to 600mm extra depth, to install new clay liner, and in addition, further excavation may be to help the installation of new sheet piling, which will be driven down 3.5 metres. There are likely to be two, and possibly three occasions during the work where a watching brief may be required.

2 Objectives

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

3 Methods

- 3.1 Archaeological supervision of all relevant groundworks to include: the inspection of revealed surfaces for archaeological features; recording of archaeological features; limited excavation of features, where appropriate.
- 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. All photography will be in digital format to a minimum resolution of 4 mega pixels. All features identified will be tied in locationally to points which are identifiable on modern Ordnance Survey mapping.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.

3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the <u>Management</u> of <u>Archaeological Projects</u> (English Heritage, 1991), to be deposited with the County Museums Service.

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 (IFA). CPAT is an IFA Registered Organisation. 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 Copies of the report will be deposited with the client within one month of the completion of on-site works. If appropriate, a short report will be published in an appropriate regional or national journal.
- 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 25 April 2007