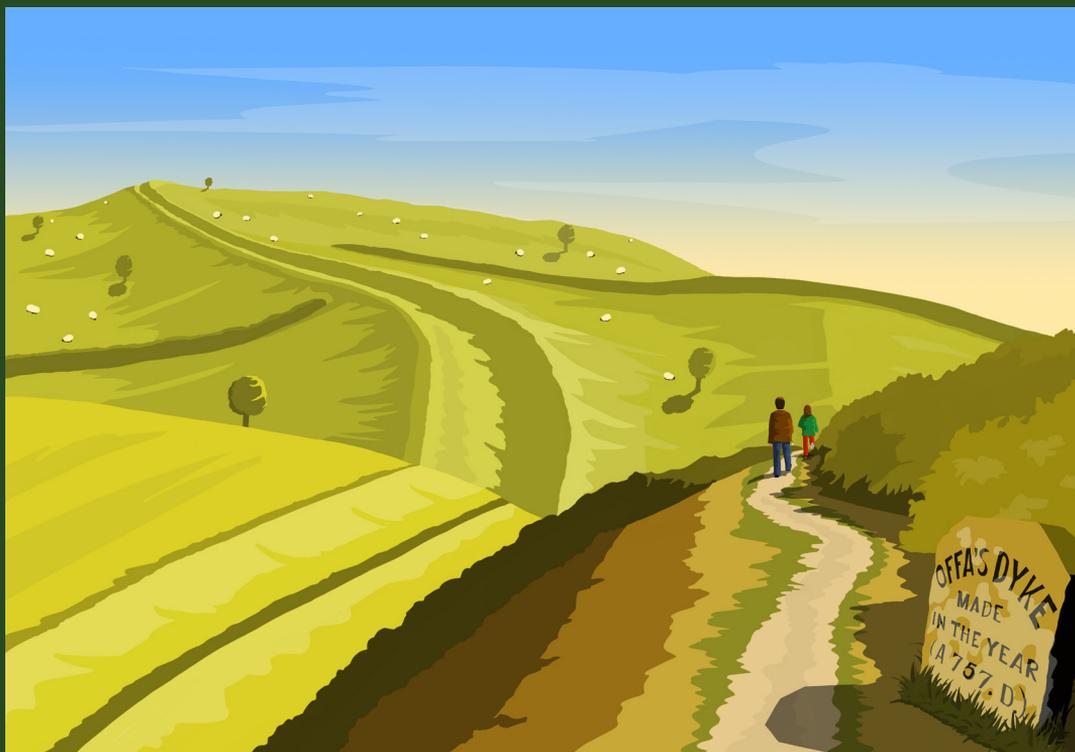


Offa's Dyke Journal



Volume 2

Edited by Howard Williams and Liam Delaney

Aims and Scope

Offa's Dyke Journal is a peer-reviewed venue for the publication of high-quality research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. The editors invite submissions that explore dimensions of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of western Britain, including their life-histories and landscape contexts. *ODJ* will also consider comparative studies on the material culture and monumentality of frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond. We accept:

1. Notes and Reviews of up to 3,000 words
2. Interim reports on fieldwork of up to 5,000 words
3. Original discussions, syntheses and analyses of up to 10,000 words

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Editors

Professor Howard Williams BSc MA PhD FSA (Professor of Archaeology, University of Chester)
Email: howard.williams@chester.ac.uk

Liam Delaney BA MA MCIfA (Doctoral Researcher, University of Chester)
Email: 1816919@chester.ac.uk

Editorial Board

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Submissions: odj@chester.ac.uk

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Volume 2 for 2020

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University of
Chester

Offa's Dyke Journal

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Offa's and Wat's Dykes

David Hill

David Hill and Margaret Worthington Hill's Offa's Dyke Project made a sustained contribution to the study of both Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke. To celebrate and reflect on this legacy, we have secured permission to reproduce David Hill's 1991 book chapter 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes' in the Offa's Dyke Journal. The article has been edited for style and includes a new introduction, re-drawn maps, the original section drawings, plus one of the original photographs. Citations have been added to key works available at the time of Hill's writing. Further citations have been added to help readers link Hill's arguments to more recent publications. Published electronically for the first time, we hope Hill's work reaches new audiences and re-energises the enthusiasm and efforts of enthusiasts, students and specialists alike in Britain's longest early medieval linear earthworks.

Keywords: Clwyd, Offa's Dyke, Offa's Dyke Project, Wales, Wat's Dyke.

Preface by Howard Williams

First published in the long out-of-print *The Archaeology of Clwyd* edited by John Manley, Stephen Greuter and Fiona Gale (Hill 1991), David Hill reviews and synthesises key results from his long-term project to investigate this pairing of linear earthworks. The study was placed in the original book between surveys of the 'Dark Ages' by Nancy Edwards and a quartet of chapters on later medieval archaeology – 'Mottes and Moated Sites' by Jack Spurgeon; 'The Stone Castles' by David Cathcart King, 'Medieval Settlement' by Glandville Jones' and 'Vernacular Architecture' by A.J. Parkinson. Nearly 30 years on, Hill's chapter is worthy of reproduction for multiple reasons.

First, Hill's chapter contains valuable information not published elsewhere about his University of Manchester fieldwork: the Offa's Dyke Project, including discussions and illustrations of ditch-sections from the project's excavations on Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn and Rhydym Hall, Hope, and Offa's Dyke at Llanfynydd. These are otherwise unavailable in print to date. The same applies also to a photograph of the excavation of Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn.¹ The chapter also includes a map depicting where Wat's Dyke might have once ran, including a section between New Brighton and Mynydd Isa based on the results of resistivity survey (Figure 9).

Second, the chapter remains a rare instance where both Wat's and Offa's Dykes are considered together and in relationship as part of the same 'earthwork complex'. Thus, Hill set a precedent yet to be fully adopted of giving Wat's Dyke due attention when it is frequently side-lined in academic discussions of Offa's Dyke. As such, Hill's work serves as a companion to the reproduction of Margaret Worthington Hill's 1997 article on Wat's

Dyke, recently republished with additional figures in *Offa's Dyke Journal* 1 (Worthington 1997; Worthington Hill 2019). This is especially important when set against the backdrop that, in their book *Offa's Dyke: History and Guide*, Hill and Worthington (2003: 162–163) dedicate only a paragraph and one illustration to Wat's Dyke and none of the details of their excavations were published therein. Likewise, subsequent research has focused on either one or the other monument (e.g. Malim and Hayes 2008; Belford 2017; Ray and Bapty 2016, but see Belford 2019).

Third, the chapter is a useful snapshot of Hill's thinking and approach to the dykes after twenty years of fieldwork through the 1970s and 1980s. Notably, Hill is outspokenly critical of both Fox's survey and his inferences. The structured approach of Hill's work tackles key and broad questions regarding both monuments: 'what', 'where' and 'when' are tackled before exploring the 'why', 'how' and 'who' of their construction. Notably, Hill's brief one-sentence conclusion is important since it points to still under-investigated parallels with other linear frontier and borderland linear monuments of the past and recent times.

Hill sadly passed away in 2011 and an edited collection honouring his work was published soon after (Owen-Crocker and Thompson 2014). Despite his achievements, it remains frustrating to students and scholars of the Mercian linear earthworks that further details of the Offa's Dyke Project's surveys and excavations were not published. Consequently, Hill's published assertions of 'conclusive proof' regarding the presence and character of the monuments are still not adequately substantiated. Moreover, the county of Clwyd was abolished in 1996. Despite these caveats, the chapter is worthy of reproduction and it contains insights of value to the student and researcher today. In addition to the points above, it is worth noting that Hill's evaluation of the Whitford Dyke has been borne out by further research (Jones 2018). Furthermore, his vivid speculation regarding the rationale and planning of the monuments has an enduring appeal (expanded upon in Hill and Worthington 2003), including the suggestion that Wat's Dyke was 'better engineered' and perhaps succeed Offa's Dyke (Malim and Hayes 2008).

This richly illustrated study can now be made available again in a new open-access digital format. It is worthy of attention today both as a snapshot of the work done and its intellectual context, but also because many of its questions and approaches remain pertinent to current thinking about the construction, placement and significance of Britain's greatest linear earthworks.

Introduction

Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke together form the largest archaeological monument complex in Britain. It must follow, therefore, that the dykes are also the largest

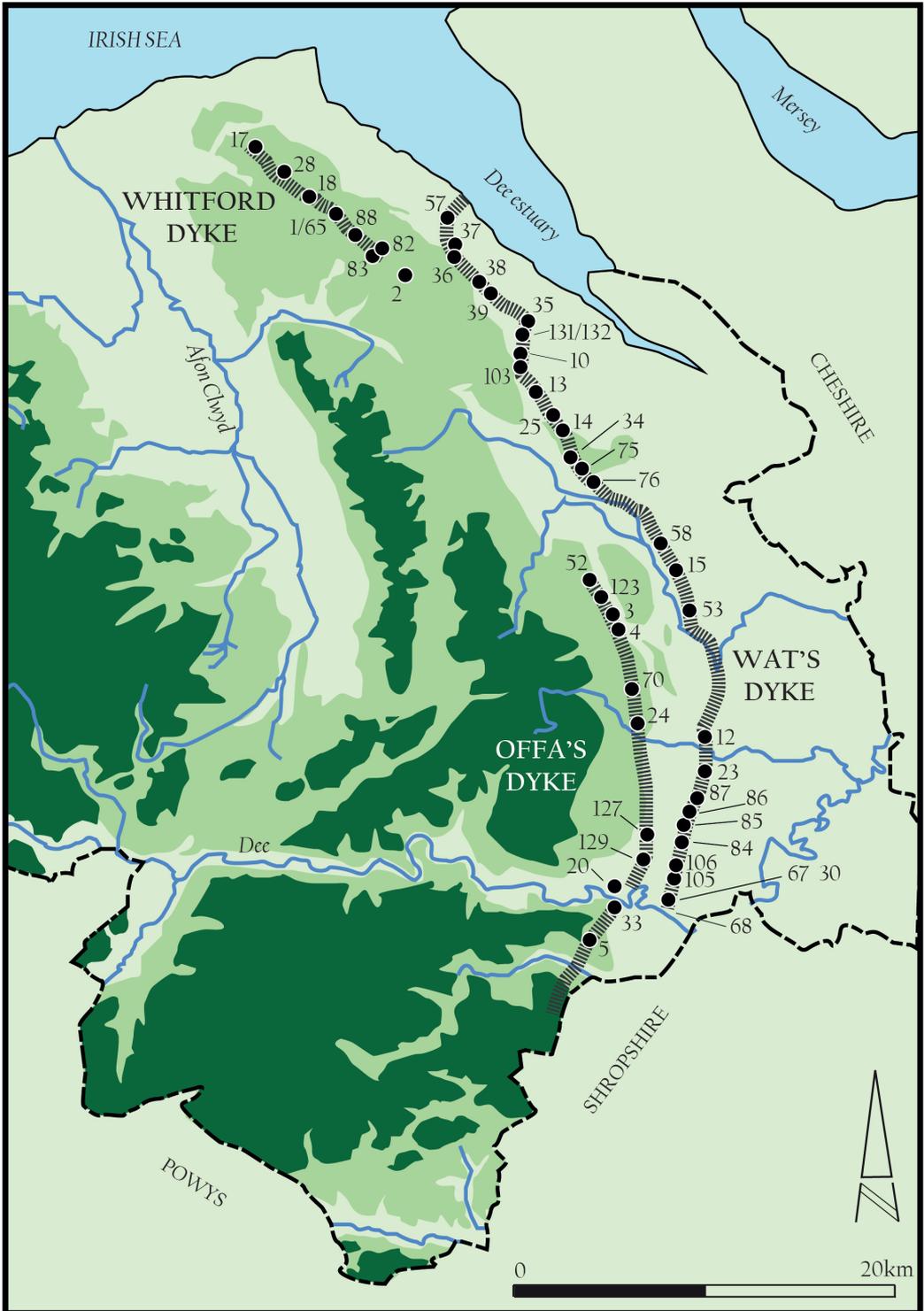


Figure 1: Distribution map showing sites excavated in Clwyd along the length of Offa's and Wat's Dykes, and the Whitford Dyke

archaeological monuments in Clwyd,² but are they the most, or even among the most *important*, archaeological monuments in Clwyd?

These earthworks, comprising of banks each with a ditch on their west (Welsh) side, enter the county in the south. Offa's Dyke crosses the Ceiriog at Chirk Castle (SJ 264 376) and Wat's Dyke (near SJ 300 410) crosses the Dee at Ruabon (Wynnstay Park).³ They both mark off the high ground, Offa's Dyke running along the eastern limit of the plateau and Wat's Dyke along the western edge of the plain. However, Offa's Dyke turns swiftly into a side valley and peters out near Llanfynydd (SJ 274 573) having completed only 13 miles (20km) of the way to the Irish Sea coast. The altogether more impressive and well-engineered Wat's Dyke passes through Wrexham and then follows the north and east side of the Alyn valley, skirts Mold and runs parallel to the Dee estuary marking off the better agricultural land before reaching the Irish Sea coast at Basingwerk (SJ 198 775), a distance of 28 miles (45km). In addition, there is a piece of earthwork of indeterminate length traditionally called Offa's Dyke (and which we now generally refer to as the 'Whitford Dyke') which is to be found inland from the sea at Trelawnynd (SJ 104 793) and at Whitford (SJ 130 771). This earthwork will be discussed in detail later.

Offa's Dyke would appear to be an eighth-century work associated with Offa, King of Mercia and essentially the overlord of southern Britain (AD 757–796).⁴ Wat's Dyke is therefore dated by analogy to roughly the same period; Stenton (1955: xviii) suggested the reign of Aethelbald (AD 716–757). In reality, however, there is no secure dating for Wat's Dyke.⁵

Are the Dykes important? They are certainly large and they deserve respect and protection, but what else? The Dykes split off a third of the county on the east and two-thirds on the west and they thus indicate the dual heritage of this border shire with its long English history in the east and the Celtic-speaking heritage to the west (Figure 1). The Dykes are thus two fixed points in a very long (and ill-recorded) period when Britons and Saxon confronted each other but where the east of the present county was permanently Anglian or Saxon. The Domesday distributions confirm this (Figure 2). However, the frontier was fluid: we should recognise that *Cledemutha* was built as a *burh* by Edward the Elder (Edwards 1991). Earlier, it may be that from 826 until the battle of the Conwy in 881, for at least two generations, all of Clwyd was under Mercian rule.

Secondly, the Dykes should tell us of the nature of English settlement, and its organisation, by the predominant Mercian kingdom of the period 750–850, into a defensive net against Welsh raids.

² From 1996 divided into Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham.

³ Subsequently, scholars have presumed it does not cross the Dee but follows it to the Dee/Ceiriog confluence, see Worthington 1997; Worthington Hill 2019.

⁴ The original publication stated '759–98'.

⁵ See Malim and Hayes 2008 for the first published dates of Wat's Dyke at Gobowen, which suggested the possibility of a later date of construction, during the reigns of Cenwulf and Ceolwulf (AD 796–823).

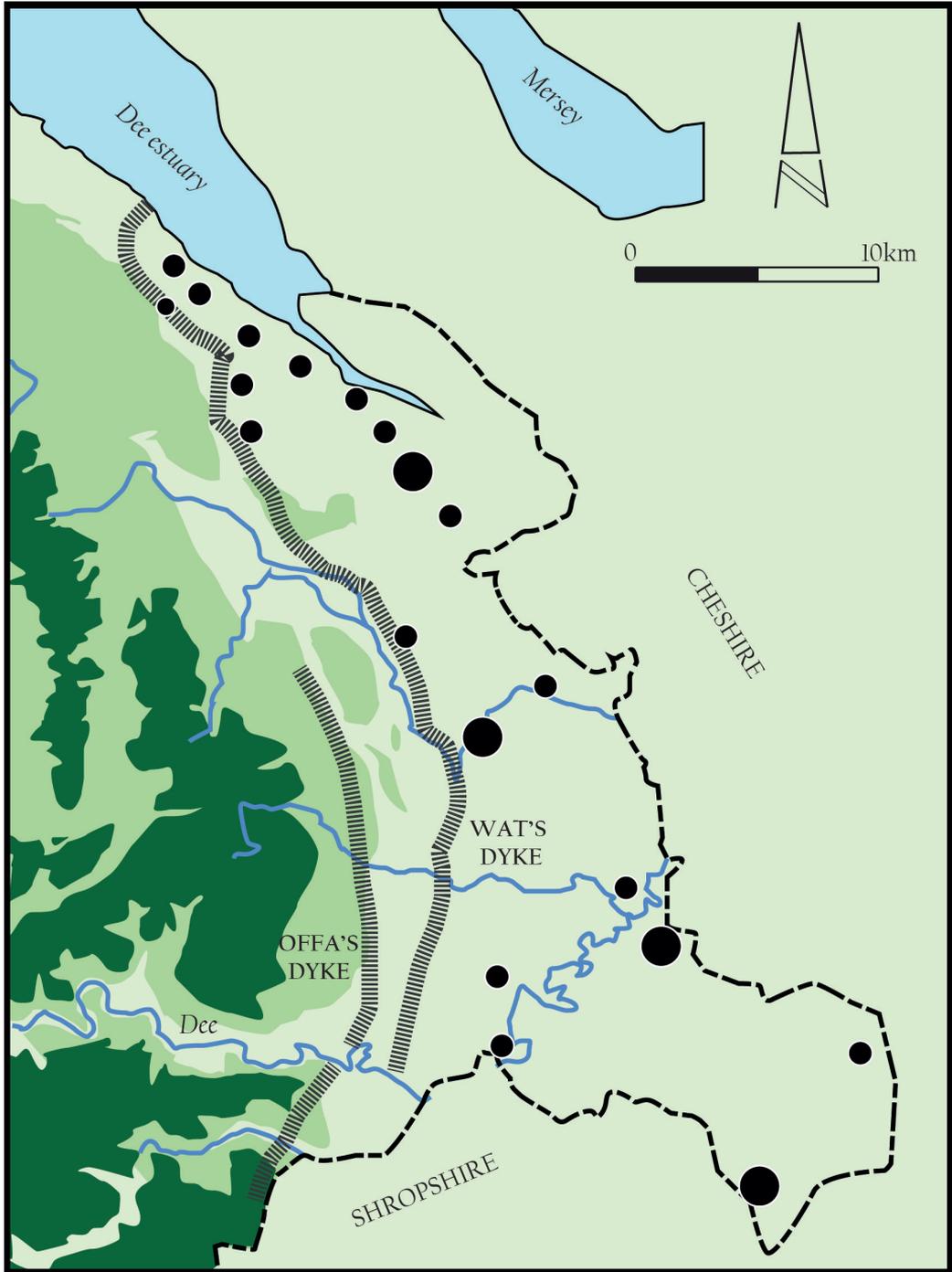


Figure 2: 'English' settlements in Clwyd at the time of Domesday in 1086. Note that all the settlements are east of Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke



Figure 3: An oblique aerial view of Offa's Dyke west of Rhostyllen near Wrexham. The Dyke is often preserved under later field boundaries and in the photograph runs from bottom-left to top-right. The photograph looks north-north-west. Cadwgan Hall is in the centre of the photograph, the crossing of the Clywedog at the top of the image

Thirdly, the monuments mark off the Welsh kingdoms and they ought to give some insight into those problems that Nancy Edwards deals with elsewhere (Edwards 1991), the nature of the Welsh kingdoms and their economy. For across this barrier of the dykes we should expect movements; not simply the attempt at criminal or military movements, raids and warfare; but we must ask ourselves how the large economy of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms affected the smaller Welsh kingdoms? Should we not expect traders as well as raiders? And should this not be reflected archaeologically in passageways through the linear earthworks? Should we not expect toll-stations, customs posts or other control points? Did salt, pottery or silver pass the frontier and if so in what form? There seems to be no known trade demonstrated by artefacts or finds from the collapse of Roman rule until the tenth-century coinage of Hywel Dda.⁶

⁶ The equation of the dykes with a 'border' between Welsh and English-speaking peoples is a long-standing assumption. See Hill and Worthington (2003) and Ray and Bapty (2016: 254–297) for different perspectives on the relationships between the dykes and the Mercian frontier.

The business of the archaeologist is to recreate the past, to allow us to visualise the past in the context of the physical remains and it must be admitted that in relation to the dykes this is not easy, they are a ‘dead monument in an empty landscape’ (see Hill and Worthington 2003: 46) (Figure 3). It is possible to suggest the sequence of events leading to its construction. However, it is more difficult to suggest how, or if, the monuments ‘worked’. We might proceed more efficiently in evaluating these monuments’ importance if we asked ourselves the questions of ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, and ‘why’.

I keep six honest serving-men;

(They taught me all I knew)

Their names are What and Why and When

And How and Where and Who.

(Kipling 1902: 59)

What?

The Dykes are best described in terms of ‘what’ by considering Site 25, Sychdyn (Figure 4). Wat’s Dyke, here near Mold, consists of a low earthen bank today crowned with hedges or trees about 1–1.5m high with a shallow, sometimes waterlogged, ditch in front of it. The whole construction is some 2.4m across. When excavated, however, the shallow ditch turns out to be 6m wide and some 2.4m deep with a cleaning slot at the bottom. Behind this considerable obstacle, the bank appears to consist of a turf front with an earth bank itself stabilised with layers of turf. From a reconstruction of the shape of the bank it probably stood originally some 2m high. If one postulates a palisade, then the whole obstruction from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the palisade would have been 6m high. In Clwyd, the question of a palisade or wall may have been answered by Site 52, Llanfynydd Schoolfield (SJ 279 567). This site was excavated to confirm that Offa’s Dyke had reached to this point; it was being assumed that the road marked the line of the bank of the Dyke. In the Schoolfield, at the base of the bank upon which the road was constructed, the ditch was located (Figure 5). In the primarily silt of the ditch were blocks of stone; the interpretation was therefore that the bank had been crowned by an unmortared stone wall. With or without a wall or palisade on the top or an *abattis* of thorn in the ditch, the Dyke would have been a very considerable barrier.

Where?

‘Where’ is a problem of great complexity which the Offa’s Dyke Project has concerned itself with for many years and with considerable success. It is a controversial matter and will have to be discussed here. The simplest Dyke is Wat’s Dyke so let us start with that. The line runs clearly northwards from Wynnstay Park in Ruabon (SJ 303 423)

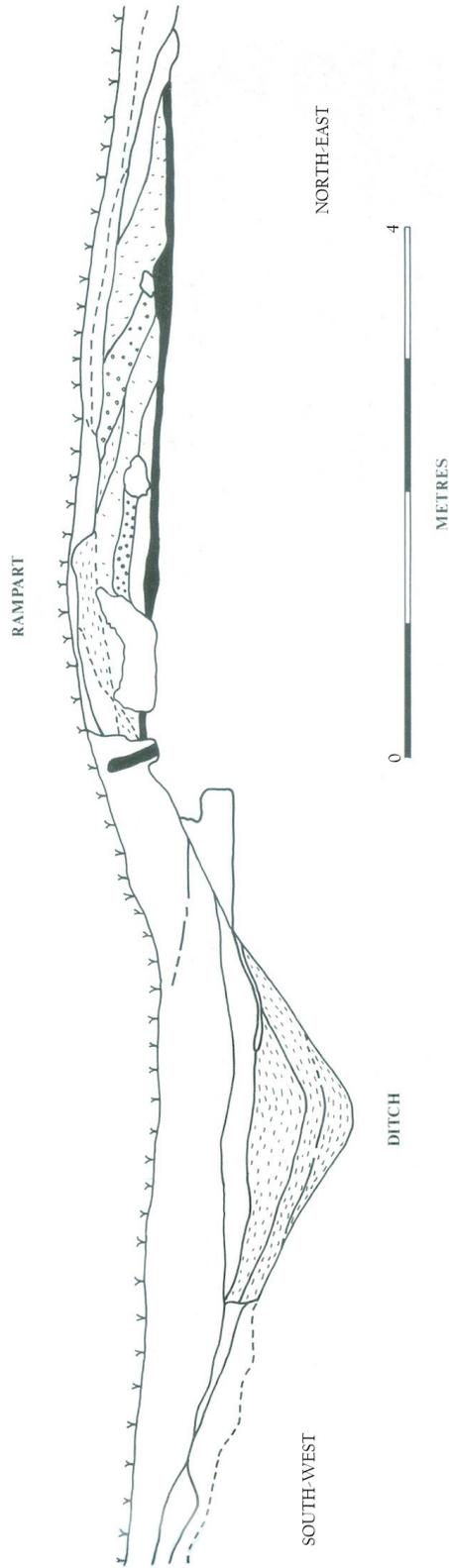


Figure 4: A section excavated across Wat's Dyke at Sychdyn near Mold which clearly revealed the former extent of the wide ditch (Note: the editors have changed the scale from 20m to 4m, presuming the original scale to be an error)

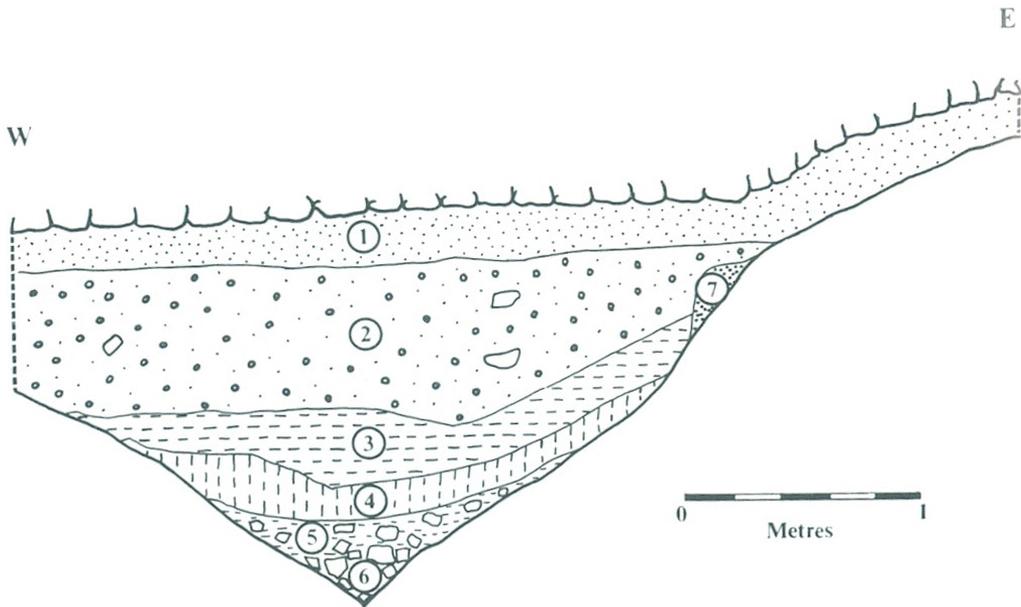


Figure 5: A section across Offa's Dyke at Llanfynydd (Flintshire). Offa's Dyke has not yet been shown to run further north than Llanfynydd

over Pentre Clawdd Hill (SJ 313 443) to Erddig (SJ 326 485) and through Wrexham: all this is as described by Sir Cyril Fox. However, at the River Alyn (SJ 333 534) Fox lost the line of the earthworks and disbelieved the Ordnance Survey (OS) (Figure 6). The surveyors of the Ordnance Survey had felt that they could recognise Wat's Dyke for two thirds of the distance of 5.4km whereas Fox declared 'the Alyn ravine itself represented the line of the frontier'. Now these are loaded expressions, for to call the Alyn a 'ravine' conjures up to the armchair or library-fast archaeologist a picture which is not the situation on the ground. At most seasons of the year the Alyn can be forded at any point and the sides of the ravine can easily be climbed. The 'ravine' is a clear landscape feature and a considerable natural obstacle, but 'ravine' implies impassibility for the stretch of 5.6km and this description is not appropriate. In fact, at Site 53, Hope, Rhydym Hall (SJ 312 569) Eric Foster excavated the ditch of the Dyke (Hill and Worthington 2003: 186) (Figure 7). The 'known' line of the Dyke can therefore be extended over much of the distance. Fox's line continues from Hope past Mold to the Afon Conwy west of Northop; here Fox thought the Dyke had never been completed although he recognised short sections at Holywell and at the Nant-y-Flint.

it can hardly be doubted that these were constructed to bar access to the coastal flat between Basingwerk and Flint at the only points where natural obstacles were non-existent. In the case of the latter, construction was started on either flank of the vulnerable portion but was not carried to the centre... When it is remembered that incompleteness, equally



Figure 6: Suggested line of Wat's Dyke in the Alyn valley near Wrexham. According to Sir Cyril Fox, the Dyke did not exist in this area but more recent work has discovered new lengths of the Dyke

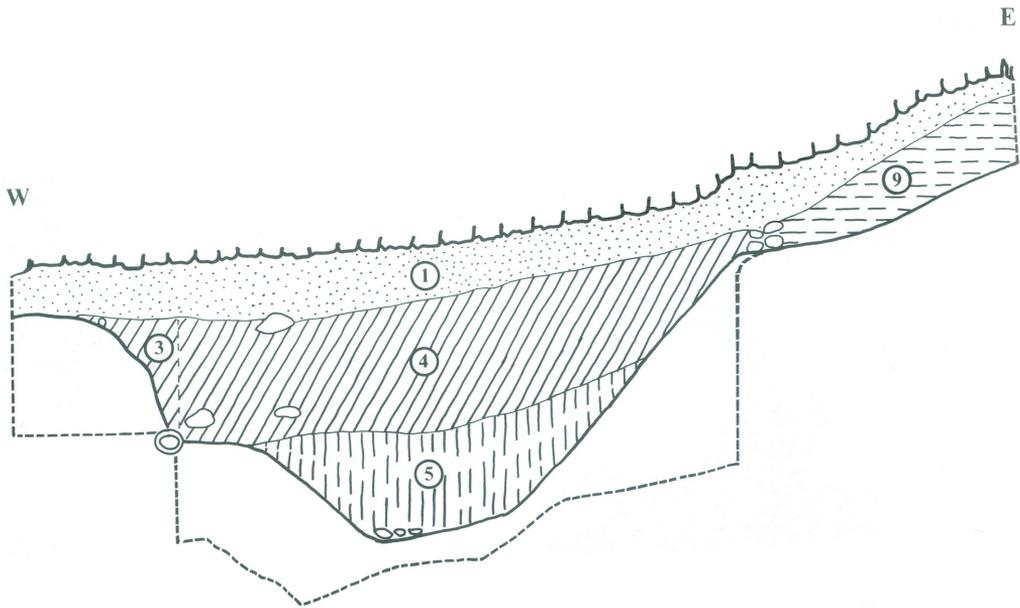


Figure 7: Excavated section across Wat's Dyke at Rhydyn Hall. Again the original size and extent of the ditch can clearly be seen

inexplicable on topographical grounds, marks Offa's Dyke in this region, it is legitimate to suggest that – to the Mercians – it was a remote, difficult, and dangerous countryside, and that in the case of both Dykes the constructional and perhaps the military effort involved was too great to be sustained to the end. The attempted construction of Wat's Dyke hereabouts shows how essential to the Mercians the control of the south shore of the Dee estuary must have been, presumably as helping to secure the safety of Chester. (Fox 1955: 263)

Now, this section of Wat's Dyke shows Fox to be deeply confused about the area, having to square its 'incompleteness' with its strategic importance by a take of bungling. It is even more difficult to understand the paucity of the fieldwork. Figure 8 shows a completely different picture to that claimed by Fox, in fact only in two areas on this stretch from where Fox thought it terminated near Northop to its actual termination on the coast are there still sections of the Dyke yet unrecognised. A number of excavations have taken place (Table 1).

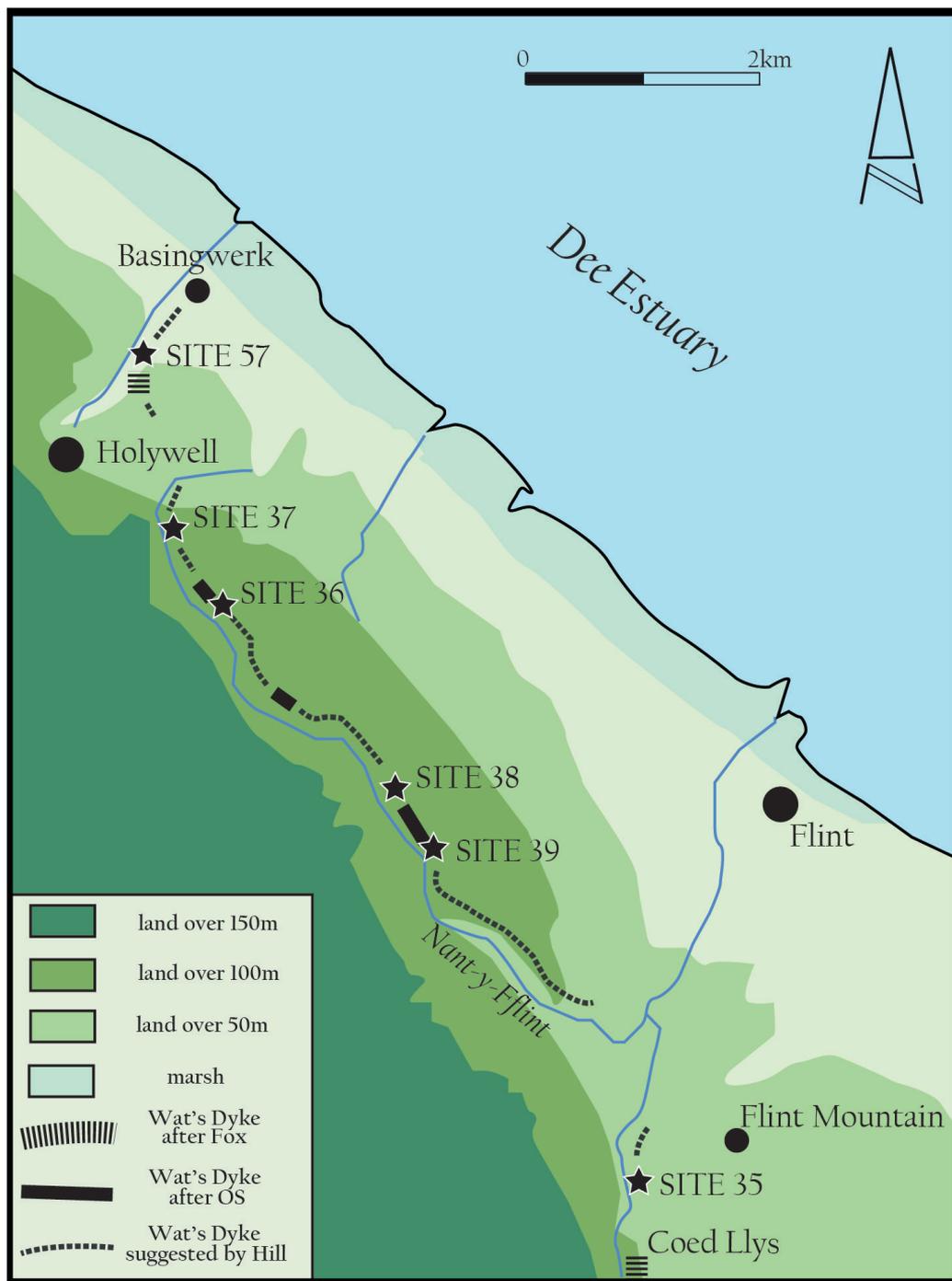


Figure 8: The northern end of Wat's Dyke between Flint and Holywell. Sir Cyril Fox thought that the Dyke had never been completed in this area, despite its strategic importance. Once again recent work has shown that the Dyke was originally continuous

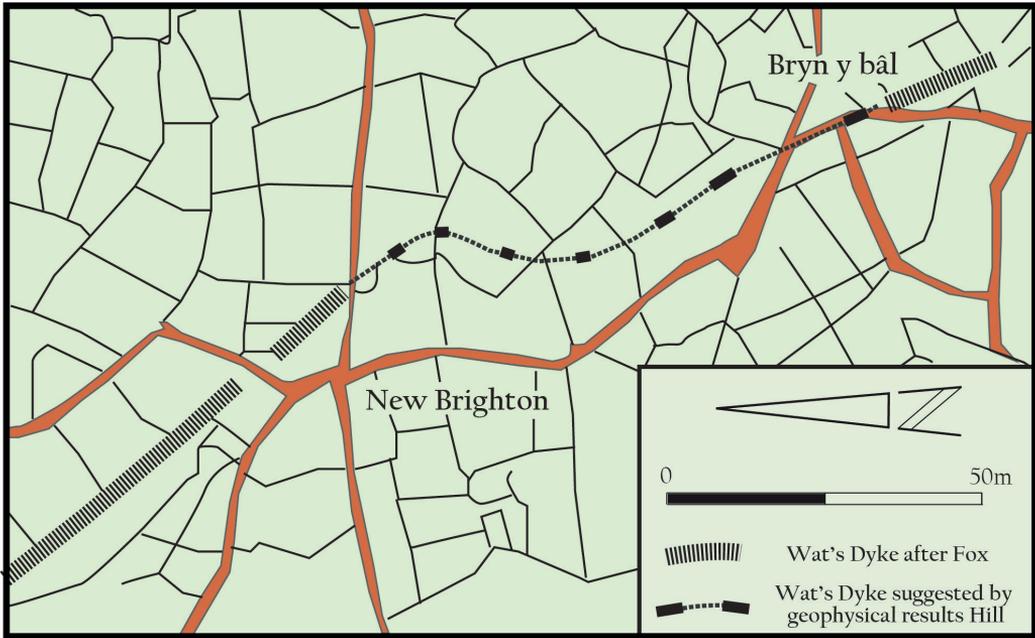


Figure 9: Results of a resistivity survey across fields at Bryn-y-Bâl near Mold indicate the line of Wat's Dyke, although its existence here has not yet been proven conclusively by excavation

Table 1: The Offa's Dyke Project's investigations on the line of Wat's Dyke revealing fresh evidence for the monument.

| Site | Place | National Grid Reference |
|------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 36 | Holywell, Coetia Clwyd | SJ 198 745 |
| 37 | Coed Llwybr-y-bi | SJ 196 747 |
| 38 | Flint, Bethel Chapel | SJ 213 731 |
| 39 | Flint, Fernside Cottage | SJ 216 727 |
| 57 | Holywell, Coed Strand | SJ 917 698 |
| 138 | Flint, Northop Bypass | SJ 232 698 |

There really can be no doubt that the Dyke has been conclusively proved as passing through these areas. The discovery of these two important stretches within Clwyd, at the Alyn valley and in the north, is a major achievement of the Offa's Dyke Project.

If one looks at the line of Wat's Dyke in simplified plans it is noticeable that such maps as appear in *Domesday Geography of England* (Darby 1971) or the *Ordnance Survey Map of Dark Age Britain* (OS 1966) show smaller gaps in the line in Clwyd. We have dealt with the major gaps in the areas of the Alyn and the norther termination. It is towards two smaller gaps that we should now turn. These were considered to be caused, according to Sir Cyril Fox, by forest so dense that a man could not pass. I have dealt with these gaps elsewhere and we have proved, archaeologically, that these gaps are caused by agriculture and the

Dyke had been originally continuous. The proof is still lacking at Bryn-y-Bâl where we have suggested a line across the fields (Figure 9). Offa's Dyke is, however, more fractious. It runs continuously along the plateau edge through Coedpoeth (SJ 293 540) and into the Cegidog Valley (SJ 284 554). From there, the Dyke is lost at Llanfynydd; it *may* run up the hill towards Treuddyn for some way as the Ordnance Survey shows it, for it is certain that it is at Site 52 (SJ 279 567) in Llanfynydd. What happens is uncertain and the very attractive idea (to me at least) that Offa's Dyke then linked to the north with Wat's Dyke, argued in two previous notes, cannot now be sustained, at least in its original form (Hill 1974). The 1974 theory suggested that the original line of Offa's Dyke came from the south to Llanfynydd in the way described above and then crossed over to Wat's Dyke 'corner' (perhaps at SJ 268 627) and followed Wat's Dyke to the sea. This would have made the whole of Wat's Dyke south of the 'corner' phase II or the replacement of Offa's Dyke. Three excavations (Table 2) reveal the fact that the structure of Wat's Dyke at these two widely separated points on the north and on the south of the 'corner' are such that it is almost certain that they are of the same 'build' and constructed by the same people at the same time. At the time, the two notes mentioned above, considered that the place-names on the Dyke were significant. However, there now appear to be 'Wat's Dyke' names on Offa's Dyke; 'Offa' names on the Wat's Dyke; the possibility that Offa's Dyke was called in one section (not in Clwyd) *Rough Ditch* similar to the present derivation of the Herefordshire *Rowe Ditch*: and finally the Wrexham stretch of Wat's Dyke was probably called *Devil's Ditch* (on the original drawings for the first edition of the Ordnance Survey now in the Map Room of the British Museum). In view of all this I feel that the place-name evidence should be left to someone more qualified to discuss it.

Table 2: excavations near Hope and Mold by the Offa's Dyke Project

| Site | Place | National Grid Reference |
|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 15 | Hope, Pigeon House Farm | SJ 206 593 |
| 75 | Mold Rural, Watergate Estate | SJ 263 637 |
| 76 | Mold Rural, Bod Offa Farm | SJ 264 636 |

What is clear is that the structure known as Offa's Dyke at Ysceifiog, Whitford and Trelawnyd, is not similar to any other section of Offa's or Wat's Dykes. The gap of 30.6km from the last known point at Llanfynydd (Site 52) should warn us of problems and the prevalence of short dykes in the central Marches offer a parallel to this exposed fragment. It is the nature of the excavated and observed dyke, consisting as it does of a low earthwork between two quarry ditches (Table 3) which is clear proof that this earthwork is not part of the Offa's Dyke system although we still await confirmation of its date⁷. This earthwork does not exist at Ysceifiog (Site 2) and we have demonstrated the termination of this Dyke at Pen-y-Gelli wood (Site 83, SJ 135 764). There was no sign of any earthworks in the considerable cut made between Ysceifiog and Pen-y-Gelli wood by the road improvements to the A55 at Site 121 (SJ 136 759).

There are still major problems associated with the line of both Wat’s Dyke (with detailed work still being needed on the crossing of the Afon Conwy and within the confines of Holywell) with Whitford Dyke where we do not know its western end and with the northern end of Offa’s Dyke to the north of site 52 at Llanfynydd.

When

When were the Dykes built? It would obviously be perverse to argue against the entire in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* written by a Welshman at the West Saxon court in 893 associating the Dyke with Offa in the late eighth century. And this traditional view of the dating is borne out by the place-name of the Dyke and the traditions attached to it. It is certain that the Dyke has always been known; knowledge of it has not been lost and the knowledge attaching it to the great Mercian king survived through the Middle Ages to appear on the first of the maps and to be recorded by the first of the antiquaries. However, it should be noted that the statement by Asser and its context is important. Asser spends a considerable amount of time recounting the infamy of a certain wife of a West Saxon king, a tale quite suitable for the collections of the brothers Grimm. This lady was accused of all kinds of misdemeanours not least in accidentally poisoning King Beorhtric, her husband, in 802 whilst successfully poisoning a ‘certain young man very dear to the king’: apparently a pastime in which she often indulged. In the midst of this fable, told to explain why the West Saxons did not afford the title of ‘Queen’ to the wife of the King, Asser offers the information:

There was in Mercia in fairly recent times a certain vigorous king called Offa, who terrified all the neighbouring kings and provinces around him, and who had a great dyke built between Wales and Mercia from sea to sea.

Rex nomine Offa, qui vallum magnum inter Britainnium atque Merciam de mari usque ad mare fieri imperavit.

The only other evidence we have for the date of the Dykes is the fact that Offa’s Dyke had been shown archaeologically to overlie, and therefore be later than, Roman remains at Frifth (SJ 284 553) (Fox 1955: 40–44).⁸

Why, how and who?

So to ‘why’ and ‘how’ and ‘who’. The reason lying behind the construction of such an enormous work has led to people making guesses about its use for centuries. Until this century those guesses were seen almost entirely in terms of warfare and defence although there were some guesses which saw it as a legal barrier. However, Fox suggested that the whole thing was ‘an agreed frontier’ and quoted in evidence two places where he thought that the line of the earthworks demonstrated this.

It should be noted, however, that the line of the Dyke does not prove that Offa's Dyke is an agreed frontier. A possible scenario for the construction of Offa's Dyke is as follows:

1. There were a series of devastating raids into England that Offa and the Mercians could not answer. Attempts to reply by counter-raids did not succeed and the farmers in the border area abandoned their fields and withdrew.⁹
2. The king decided to apply a typical Dark Age solution and faced the most hostile Welsh kingdoms with a bank and ditch (these are known both on the continent, in East Anglia and with the Wansdyke in Wiltshire).
3. The king and his advisors, possibly an ealdorman (the highest rank of Saxon official) talked it over with the council or *witan* and decided on a line for the works to follow. What is difficult to conceive for those days before maps is the intense understanding of the shape of the kingdom and the depth of local knowledge that allowed them to plan the line.
4. Rough sightings were probably made and checked with beacon fires for line.
5. The crisis in the area could not have been very great for there was time to survey and layout the line making the very best use of the landscape, the hillsides, and rivers. Long lines were laid out so that they took into account the number of river crossings (always a weak point) and the control of fords. A line was worked out which always attempted to be in a strong position with good visual command to the west.
6. Enormous fires were lit to clear the ground and the sight lines. A plough marked out the line in the open fields and pastures. Marker posts were erected on some stretches and in particularly difficult or complex parts there were built small banks and ditches as marking out features.
7. During the winter, the king, meeting with his *witan*, ordered men from every village and settlement under his control (and we have a tribute list of the time, the *Tribal Hidage*) to report to the frontier, probably under their own reeves and ealdormen, where they were assigned their areas of work. Those who did not go on this construction expedition would have contributed to those that did (one could expect about 5 men to a village) by loaning tools, ponies, giving food and providing other support. It probably would be constructed in the late spring or early summer, at the Rogation days, the traditional time for such work in medieval Europe, just before Whitsuntide.¹⁰
8. On arrival at the marking out bank or plough mark, each group would find the length they had been assigned and they would set about digging and building this section.
9. The turf would be stripped off and, in most cases, used to stabilise the bank, it would also be used to build the front. Using whatever local materials were to hand, stone if

⁹ See Ray and Bapty 2016 for alternative scenarios.

¹⁰ See Hill and Worthington 2003 for further details.

they could find it in easy blocks, or timber, they would construct a palisade or wall. In a very short time the ditch and bank would also grow its obstruction of blackthorn and bramble.

10. The work was then ready. How precisely it worked I am unsure, and so it is clear that much more work is left to do.
11. However, it was not a success and the better engineered, thought-out and constructed Wat’s Dyke replaced it. The line also includes a series of hillforts and strong points; were these in use?¹¹
12. Even this did not succeed and in 822 the Mercians invaded North Wales and ruled for two generations, thus doing away with the frontier raids that had led to the construction of the Dykes in the first place.

Modern parallels, such as the relations between Lebanon and the Israelis, may help us to understand these works, designed as barriers to raids rather than walls against major armies, and as such are to be seen throughout history.

Table 3: Excavations on Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke in the former county of Clwyd

| Site | Parish, SITE NAME | Year of Excavation | Grid Reference | Monument Investigated |
|------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Whitford, BRYNBELLA | 1926 | SJ 129 771 | WHIT |
| 2 | Ysceifiog, CIRCLE | 1926 | SJ 152 753 | WHIT |
| 3 | Frith, VILLAGE | 1927 | SJ 284 553 | OFFA |
| 4 | Frith, HALL | 1927 | SJ 288 548 | OFFA |
| 5 | Chirk, CAEAU-GWYNION | 1928 | SJ 273 395 | OFFA |
| 10 | Northop, MIDDLE MILL | 1955 | SJ 233 691 | WATS |
| 12 | Acton, WAT’S DYKE SCHOOL | 1975 | SJ 334 523 | WATS |
| 13 | Sychdyn, CLAWDD OFFA | 1975 | SJ 243 678 | WATS |
| 14 | Mold, BYPASS | 1976 | SJ 257 653 | WATS |
| 15 | Hope, PIGEON HOUSE FARM | 1974 | SJ 306 593 | WATS |
| 17 | Trelawnyd, VILLAGE | 1973 | SJ 089 798 | WHIT |
| 18 | Whitford, TRE-ABBOT-BACH | 1973 | SJ 112 784 | WHIT |
| 20 | Cefn, WATERLOO TOWER | 1976 | SJ 285 422 | OFFA |
| 23 | Wrexham, EXCHANGE STATION | 1972 | SJ 329 509 | WATS |
| 24 | COEDPOETH | 1973 | SJ 293 512 | OFFA |
| 25 | Sychdyn, PIPELINE | 1974 | SJ 252 659 | WATS |
| 28 | Trelawnyd, PENTRE FFYDDION | 1976 | SJ 104 790 | WHIT |
| 30 | Ruabon, WYNNSTAY PARK | 1976 | SJ 308 425 | WATS |
| 34 | Mold Rural, MYNYDD ISA | 1957 | SJ 262 639 | WATS |

¹¹ See Belford 2017.

| | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|------|------------|------|
| 35 | Flint Mountain, BRYN-Y-GARREG | 1977 | SJ 232 698 | WATS |
| 36 | Holywell, COETIA CLWYD | 1976 | SJ 198 745 | WATS |
| 37 | Flint, COED LLWYR-Y-BI | 1977 | SJ 196 747 | WATS |
| 38 | Flint, BETHEL CHAPEL | 1977 | SJ 213 731 | WATS |
| 39 | Flint, FERNSIDE COTTAGE | 1977 | SJ 216 726 | WATS |
| 52 | Llanfynydd, SCHOOLFIELD | 1978 | SJ 279 567 | WHIT |
| 53 | Hope, RHYDDYN HALL | 1978 | SJ 312 569 | WATS |
| 57 | Holywell, Coed Strand, CUPID'S GROVE | 1978 | SJ 191 767 | WATS |
| 58 | Hope, CLAWDD OFFA | 1978 | SJ 299 607 | WATS |
| 65 | Whitford, BRYNBELLA | 1979 | SJ 129 771 | WHIT |
| 67 | Ruabon, BOAT HOUSE | 1980 | SJ 308 432 | WATS |
| 68 | Ruabon, NANT-Y-CAE-COCH | 1980 | SJ 307 423 | WATS |
| 70 | BRYMBO, area of | 1892 | SJ 29 52 | OFFA |
| 75 | Mold Rural, WATERGATE ESTATE | 1981 | SJ 263 637 | WATS |
| 76 | Mold Rural, BOD OFFA FARM | 1981 | SJ 264 636 | WATS |
| 82 | Whitford, RHYDWEN FARM | 1981 | SJ 133 766 | WHIT |
| 83 | Whitford, PEN-Y-GELLI | 1981 | SJ 135 764 | WHIT |
| 84 | Erddig, THE ROOKERY | 1982 | SJ 324 478 | WATS |
| 85 | Erddig, CISTERN | 1982 | SJ 325 480 | WATS |
| 86 | Erddig, BIG WOOD | 1982 | SJ 325 485 | WATS |
| 87 | Wrexham Regis, COURT WOOD | 1982 | SJ 328 489 | WATS |
| 88 | Whitford, CORNEL CAE | 1982 | SJ 125 775 | WHIT |
| 103 | Northop, MIDDLE MILL | 1984 | SJ 233 691 | WATS |
| 105 | Ruabon, PENTRE CLAWDD | 1984 | SJ 313 443 | WATS |
| 106 | Ruabon, BLACK BROOK KNOLL | 1984 | SJ 321 456 | WATS |
| 121 | Whitford, A55 IMPROVEMENT | 1986 | SJ 136 759 | WHIT |
| 123 | Llanfynydd, COED ISA | 1986 | SJ 282 562 | OFFA |
| 127 | Johnstown, HARRINGTON'S | 1986 | SJ 300 457 | OFFA |
| 129 | Ruabon, TATHAM ROAD | 1987 | SJ 302 448 | OFFA |
| 131 | Flint Mountain, COED LLYS | 1987 | SJ 232 698 | WATS |
| 132 | Northop, COED LLYS | 1987 | SJ 232 698 | WATS |

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David Hill (1937–2011)