Envisioning Wat's Dyke

John G. Swogger and Howard Williams

In response to the challenge set by one of us (Williams this volume), this chapter explores new avenues for a public archaeology of Wat's Dyke. A host of digital and real-world initiatives for public and community engagement are suggested, but the focus is upon one new initiative: the What's Wat's Dyke? Heritage Trail which aims to envision Wat's Dyke within the town and suburbs of Wrexham using a comic medium. From this basis, the potential is explored for using the linearity of Wat's Dyke as a gateway to explore the complex historic and cultural landscapes of the Welsh Marches from prehistory to the present.

Introduction

Williams (this volume) sets the challenge: how do we develop new initiatives for engaging contemporary communities and visitors with the 'monumental intangibility' of Wat's Dyke, a c. 62km-long linear monument running along the edge of the Welsh uplands from the Dee estuary at Basingwerk (Flintshire) to the Morda Brook south of Maesbury (Shropshire) (Malim and Hayes 2008; Worthington Hill 2019; Malim 2020)? The stark neglect of this early medieval linear monument identified by Williams, both at heritage sites along its line, but also via digital resources, renders it open to physical damage, pseudoarchaeological and extremist political and ideological narratives, especially given the ongoing contentious nature of 'walls' past and present, in today's world (see also Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020; Williams 2020a).[1] Williams identified that Wat's Dyke is ironically more tangible in places where it is destroyed but preserved in naming practices of houses and streets, as well as schools and parks (see also Williams 2020b) than it is for visitors to (for example) English Heritage's Old Oswestry Hillfort and the National Trust's Erddig Hall and Gardens. And yet, even where it is accessible and recognised, it is subsumed within the identity of King Offa who is traditionally considered commissioner of the larger, neighbouring Offa's Dyke!

Williams makes clear that Wat's Dyke, despite running through historic landscapes and north-east Wales's largest conurbation – Wrexham – remains poorly appreciated and understood, both by the public and experts alike. Wat's Dyke is woefully under-represented in print and online maps, guides and other repositories and resources with few exceptions (see Burnham 1995; Lewis 2008). Furthermore, Wat's Dyke is omitted from, or poorly represented at, heritage destinations via out-dated on-site interpretation panels. The question is, therefore, how can we move forward to improve public awareness, engagement and understanding of Wat's Dyke?

Williams proposes:

1. A research, conservation and management strategy for Wat's Dyke and its multi-period landscape setting;

2. The production of a coherent heritage interpretation and 'brand' for the monument, including resources available in print and digitally;

3. Fostering and supporting community archaeology projects to research and sustain interest in the monument.

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[1] https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2016/11/14/the-trump-wall-in-archaeological-perspective/;
https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/03/02/trump-claims-medieval-walls-worked-they-absolutely-did/;
https://almostarchaeology.com/post/182176393408/archaeotrollingthewall

We suggest heritage comics might contribute to each of these proposals, conveying the complex stories from tangible and intangible heritage in landscapes with rich biographies from prehistory to the present, of which Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke are elements (Swogger 2019a–c; see also Swogger 2020).

Background: digital and real-world strategies for public engagement

There is potential for multiple new initiatives to enhance long-term public engagements in and understandings of Wat's Dyke. These in turn might foster responsible and enduring relationships with place, both rural and urban, focusing the monument. As well as developing a research strategy, and conducting a conservation management plan akin to that developed for Offa's Dyke (Haygarth Berry Associates 2018), Wat's Dyke also requires community fieldwork projects. The groundwork is already in place for such initiatives, illustrated not only by the long-running Caer Alyn community archaeology project which has worked close to the line of Wat's Dyke, but also the sustained amateur and professional support to focus on Old Oswestry Hillfort as a heritage and conservation locus (Swogger 2019a; Clark *et al.* 2020). Building on Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust's (CPAT) condition survey (Jones 2017), the value of engaging communities in fieldwork on, or close to, Wat's Dyke is demonstrated through the prominent fieldwork conducted in the National Trust-managed Erddig Park in 2018 (Belford 2019). Such interventions build on the long-standing precedent of the Offa's Dyke Project, run by David Hill and Margaret Worthington Hill, of using amateurs and students, at least some of whom were local people (Hill and Worthington 2003; Worthington Hill 2019). To these examples we might also add that fieldwork in and around those few contemporaneous or analogous monuments in the region, such as that conducted by Bangor University and the University of Chester at the Pillar of Eliseg, near Valle Crucis Abbey (Tong *et al.* 2015; Williams and Evans 2020), sheds light upon, and enhances public understanding of Wat's Dyke's broader context.

Indeed, part of the rationale of the establishment of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory has been to foster and connect communities and research networks together in developing new projects on Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke (Williams and Delaney 2019), including a blog dimension on the Collaboratory Wordpress site to promote news and foster debate and understanding about linear monuments.[2] In addition, the creation of a new academic peer-reviewed open-access journal to serve as a repository of high-quality resources including sites past and current research, the *Offa's Dyke Journal*, provides a rigorous foundation for public engagement activities moving forward. This is because, while an academic journal might be traditionally regarded as not public-facing, many enthusiasts and amateurs are willing and able to access academic literature directly via the Internet, and there is a thirst for in-depth quality information available open-access as opposed to behind paywalls.

Building on these initiatives, there is also considerable potential for podcasts and vlogs to become media for further dissemination of knowledge about linear monuments (Tong *et al.* 2015; Boyle 2019; Barkman-Astles 2019; Duckworth 2019).[3] As showcased at the recent *Special Offa* digital conference, virtual tours, YouTube videos, blog-posts and Twitter presentations afford diverse and innovative media for public engagement.[4] Furthermore, fostering community participation through initiatives like the Community Stewardship of Mercian Monuments (CoSMM) has the capability to provide a locally-based, but widespread network of 'citizen science', working with heritage organisations and academic institutions to foster local voices and engagement with linear monuments (see also Ray this volume).[5]

In addition to these field investigations and new digital resources, there is also considerable potential of enhancing pre-existing online platforms and their materials, including HERs records for Powys, wikis,

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[2] https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/
[3] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRD7gIrwOmLN_D4_0RbLtSA
[4] https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/2020/04/06/__roundup/
[5] https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/2017/10/08/community-stewardship-of-mercian-monuments-cosmm/

including the information available on Wikipedia, as well as more bespoke databases such as the long-running archaeological hub The Megalithic Portal.[6] In short, there are a plethora of interconnecting strategies which might be adopted to promote public appreciation and understanding of Wat's Dyke and its broader landscape settings through Flintshire, Wrexham and Shropshire. This includes places where the Dyke's course intersects with both earlier monuments (including Old Oswestry Hillfort and Bryn Alyn (Caer Alyn) hillfort) and later features of archaeological and historical significance, including medieval and modern rural, urban and industrial landscapes.

What's Wat's Dyke? A heritage comic for Wrexham

As one distinctive avenue that has the potential to possess multiple real-world and digital dimensions, we suggest comics as a potential powerful and versatile medium for fostering public engagement and understanding of Wat's Dyke and its landscape contexts. Hence, we have devised and are in the process of implementing a Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail titled: *What's Wat's Dyke?* Wrexham seems an ideal test-case, as North Wales' largest town, and allows us to tackle stretches of the Dyke which are destroyed and denuded as well as those where the Dyke is well-preserved. In doing so, we build on both blog-posts and now YouTube videos created by one of us (HW), extending his initial series of eight locations where you can see Wat's Dyke to a total of 15 potential readily accessible situations where locals and others can visit the monument (Table 1; Figure 1).[7] Using a selection of these places, our aims are to:

1. foster local people's and tourists' ability to engage with the monument as it is, and imagine how it was;

2. craft a story to include landscape and biography and engagement with the different materials and components of the linear monument;

3. encourage recognition of the wider significance in early medieval linear earthworks in comparative terms – part of local borderland stories, as well as both 'English' and 'Welsh' national stories, and wider comparative international stories of conflict, territoriality, ideology and identity in frontier zones past and present.

The nature of Wat's Dyke around Wrexham presents a series of particular challenges to interpreting the monument in a way that explains its history and construction, its original context and meaning, and what has happened to the monument in the centuries up to the present day. Because of the broken and interrupted nature of the monument and its varied accessibilities and scales of survival, any explanation has to account not just for the monument itself where it can be seen, but also for the spaces between where it survives: its absence as well as its presence within the heritage landscape of Wrexham. But despite the fact that the surviving fragments of the dyke can be difficult to see, difficult to access and difficult to interpret, an engaging story about the monument, its 9th-century functions and meanings, and its later history, can be told to those who visit it - as was discovered when the authors toured the dyke in autumn 2019.[8] In our exploration, from horse paddocks in Pandy through housing estates and cemeteries in central Wrexham to the National Trust estate at Erddig (Figure 2), it became clear that the key to understanding the monument lay in being able to (1) spot what was hidden, (2) reconstruct what had vanished, and (3) provide context for what was isolated or disjointed. As we talked about how Wat's Dyke could be better presented for public audiences, these three things developed into key objectives for any visualisations.

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6 https://www.megalithic.co.uk/
7 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRD7gIrwOmLN_D4_0RbLtSA
8 See also: https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/01/03/where-can-you-visit-wats-dyke-in-wrexham/

Figure 1: Table of the key locations of Wat's Dyke in Wrexham identified Howard Williams's blog-post 'Where can you visit Wat's Dyke in Wrexham' augmented by others and subject to discussion in this chapter as foci for the development of the *What's Wat's Dyke* comic

| Map Number	Location Name	Features	Access
1	Alyn Waters Country Park	No surviving traces of the monument on the scarp above the valley, but the likely line of the Dyke frames the top of the valley slope overlooking the country park	Access on foot or bicycle. If arriving by car, park in one of the designated car parks for Alyn Waters Country Park and walk or cycle from there
2	Llay New Road	No clear traces of the dyke surviving, but the top of scarp overlooking the Alyn is where the Dyke likely ran	Access on foot on the Wat's Dyke Way, or park and walk from Alyn Waters Country Park
3	Bryn Alyn Hillfort	The possible line of the Dyke descending into the valley from the site of the Iron Age hill-fort	The hillfort itself is on private land, but the footpath beside the river allows views
4	Bluebell Lane, Pandy	Multiple surviving sections of Wat's Dyke surviving as field boundaries	Park on Bluebell Lane, Pandy and on public footpath across the fields following the Wat's Dyke Way
5	Tegwen Lane, Garden Village	A section of Wat's Dyke preserved as a property boundary facing over a public park between housing developments leading uphill to Wat's Dyke Primary School	Park on Wat's Dyke Way or Tegwen Lane and accessible on foot or bicycle
6	Wat's Dyke Primary School	The monument survives in a 'green lung' stretching south of Wat's Dyke Primary School west of Buckingham Road	Park by Wat's Dyke Primary School or on Buckingham Road and access on foot or by bicycle
7	Crispin Lane, Wrexham	Wat's Dyke survives on line-side land east of Crispin Lane	Park on Crispin Lane or walk from Wrexham General railway station.
8	Premier Inn, Wrexham General Railway Station	A reconstructed segment of Wat's Dyke sits adjacent to the Premier Inn parallel to the railway line	Opposite Wrexham General railway station
9	Coleg Cambria, Wrexham	South of the Ruthin Road, Wat's Dyke survives beside allotments and an alleyway	Walk from Morrisons supermarket, Bellevue Park
10	Wrexham Cemetery	Wat's Dyke runs through the older graves on the west side of the municipal cemetery	Park at Wrexham Cemetery or in layby on the Ruabon Road
11	Court Wood	A well-preserved pair of sections of Wat's Dyke used as a modern property marker	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
12	Erddig Castle	The Anglo-Norman castle of Erddig reused a location deployed in the line of Wat's Dyke	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate
13	Big Wood, Erddig	Well-preserved segments of the monument in woodland between the castle and Erddig Hall	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate
14	The Rookery, Erddig Park	A well-preserved section of Wat's Dyke overlooking the Black Brook	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
15	South of Bryn Goleu to Middle Sontley	A well-preserved section of Wat's Dyke	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
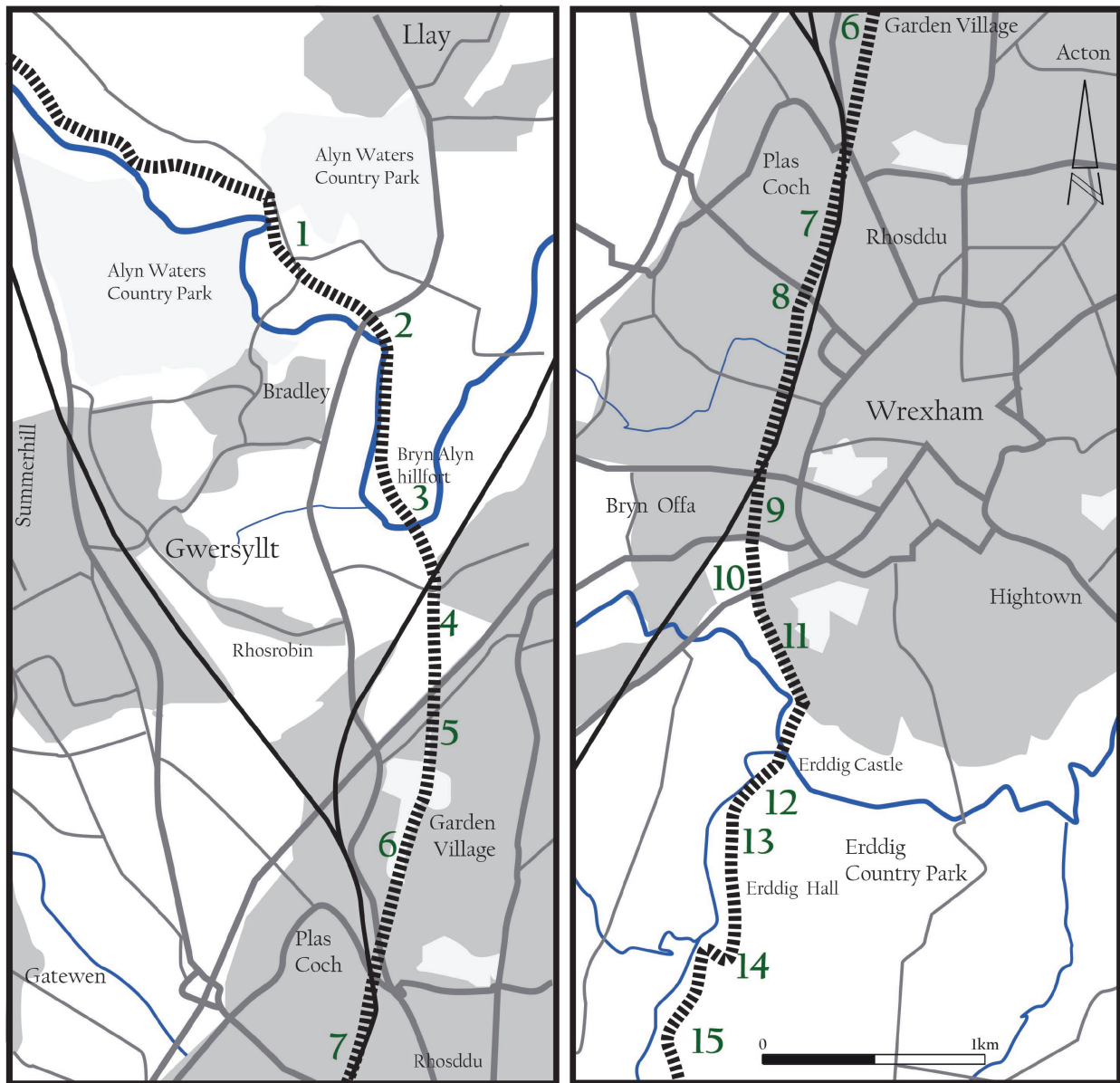
Figure 1: Map of the key locations of Wat's Dyke in Wrexham identified for HW's blog-post 'Where can you visit Wat's Dyke in Wrexham?' augmented by others and subject to discussion in this paper as foci for the development of the What's Wat's Dyke comic. Map by Howard Williams, 2020

Where Wat's Dyke survives around Wrexham, it does so primarily in marginal (sub)urban spaces: in fields at the edge of villages (south of Bluebell Lane, Pandy, location 4), in non-spaces at the back of gardens (around Garden Village/Croes Eneurys, locations 5 and 6) and allotments (south side of Ruthin Road, location 9), at the margins of alleyways (behind Alexandra Road, location 9 also) or by the sides of busy roads (along Crispin Road/Wrexham FC (location 7). The bank is often eroded, the ditch filled-in; both are frequently overgrown with grass and weeds or obscured beneath hedgerows and ivy. Even when in the company of a knowledgeable tour guide, it was not always possible to say with confidence exactly where the Wat's Dyke was – or is. Indeed, even where it was marked the signing was misleading (Wrexham Cemetery, location 10) or even inaccurate (Erddig, location 11), where it seemed most visible, it turned out be an entirely spurious – but un-signposted – reconstruction (at the edge of the Premier

Figure 2: A panorama view of a well-preserved section of Wat's Dyke at The Rookery in Erddig Park, south of Erddig Hall, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

Figure 3: Wat's Dyke reconstructed between the railway line and the Premier Inn just south of Wrexham General railway station, looking south (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

Inn near Wrexham General railway station, location 8, Figure 3).

Visualisations of the Dyke, or even its route, were of little help: dashed lines on a map confusingly indicated both Wat's Dyke and the Wat's Dyke path – or maybe they didn't (Erddig); dashed lines elsewhere were more suggestive of a buried, underground or hidden feature – when, in fact, the dyke was at that point highly visible and well-delineated (Wrexham Cemetery). While following the route of Wat's Dyke would test the most determined of urban antiquarians, it is that antiquarian eye which helped us spot Wat's Dyke hiding within the urban landscape. The route of the dyke is also a pathway through the history of the growth and development of Wrexham: from schools to suburbs, from supermarkets to allotments, from cemetery expansion to the declining fortunes of the local gentry. If you know what to look for, Wat's Dyke carves a very distinctive narrative through the 21st-century town and its suburbs. More significantly, excavation by CPAT at Erddig (Belford 2019) has

Figure 4: The alley to Buckingham Road, Garden Village, Wrexham; (a) top: looking north-east along the line of the monument; (b) bottom-left: looking west down the slope of the bank with figures standing on the line of the ditch, (c) bottom-right: looking east up the bank along the alley (Photographs: Howard Williams, 2020)

demonstrated that even where very little of the Dyke can be seen, the greatest surviving portion of both bank and ditch is buried; what survives as visible is only part of the story.

Thus, any guide to Wat's Dyke would need to be able to help those touring the dyke to spot not only the hidden survivals of the monument itself, but the later historical and landscape clues that point to its ghostly presence within the town. With this in mind, any visualisation of the dyke would need to not only reveal the shape and form of the Dyke itself, but note the relationship to later historical and landscape features that provide clues as to the invisible presence of the Dyke. Utilising illustrations familiar to archaeology – cutaways, overlays, sections, etc. – annotated with captions and diagrammatic visuals, and accompanied by a narrative explanation, both Dyke and 'absence of Dyke' can be picked out from the historical jumble and urban clutter of the modern landscape.

A good example of this would be the portion of the dyke at the southern end of the Wat's Dyke county school 'clear strip' to the alleyway leading to Buckingham Road (location 6: SJ 33185 51857). Here, the dyke is visible as a ground-level feature under hedges and garden fences, but is then very neatly sectioned by the alleyway, the tarmac of which underfoot describes the profile of the bank extremely clearly (Figure 4). However, to most people this might very well seem to be nothing more than an inconvenient hump in the path – an obstacle to prams and a hazard to cyclists. A comic panel visualisation of this portion of the dyke (Figure 5) could show through cutaway, overlay and section what these features mean in terms of elucidating the form and extent of the Dyke – and, in the shape of Howard (as narrator) and some speech-bubbles, provide a narrative explanation, framed by references to contemporary research (Swogger 2019a: 149). The difference that a narrated visual explanation can make is illustrated by a parallel example of a comic panel about general features of Offa's Dyke (Figure 6). One could imagine the photograph on the left accompanied by the text on the right in a popular or even academic publication; yet when image and text are combined, and a narrator introduced, an entirely different form of explanatory graphic emerges. Even where the line of the dyke has been utterly lost with the construction of houses, roads and the railway, such an approach will help to visualise what is no longer visible, and explain what has been forgotten. In many ways, the tour we conducted in October 2019, or the video tour of Offa's Dyke around Trefonen produced for the 'Special Offa' online event,[9] are models for how we would envisage such comics: the diagrammatic graphics drawing from traditions of archaeological illustration 'materialising' the archaeological and antiquarian view that helps identify and reveal the presence of a vanished monument in the landscape, accompanied by a narrative explanation that makes it engaging and accessible to an audience with no prior understanding of the monument or its broader contexts.

The 'pilot project' based on this idea is – at this stage in our planning – to take the form of a map, designed to guide visitors to Wat's Dyke across Wrexham by car, bike or on foot, viewing different sections of the monument as they do. The choice of points on this map, and the design of the visualisations will help tell the larger story of the reasons for the dyke being sited where it was, the different ways in which it was constructed, and the reasons why it no longer survives as a contiguous whole. Almost incidentally, such an explanation will also serve to introduce audiences to the rest of the history of Wrexham: Wat's Dyke providing a literal and metaphorical thread to follow through the town's story.

If the eventual aim of better presenting Wat's Dyke is to better engage both local as well as visiting audiences with the monument, then it may be that interpretations of the dyke will need to move away from 'specialist', site-based presentations. Exploring how local communities already engage with Wat's Dyke – even just as a street name – may provide a useful starting point for alternative mechanisms for engagement.

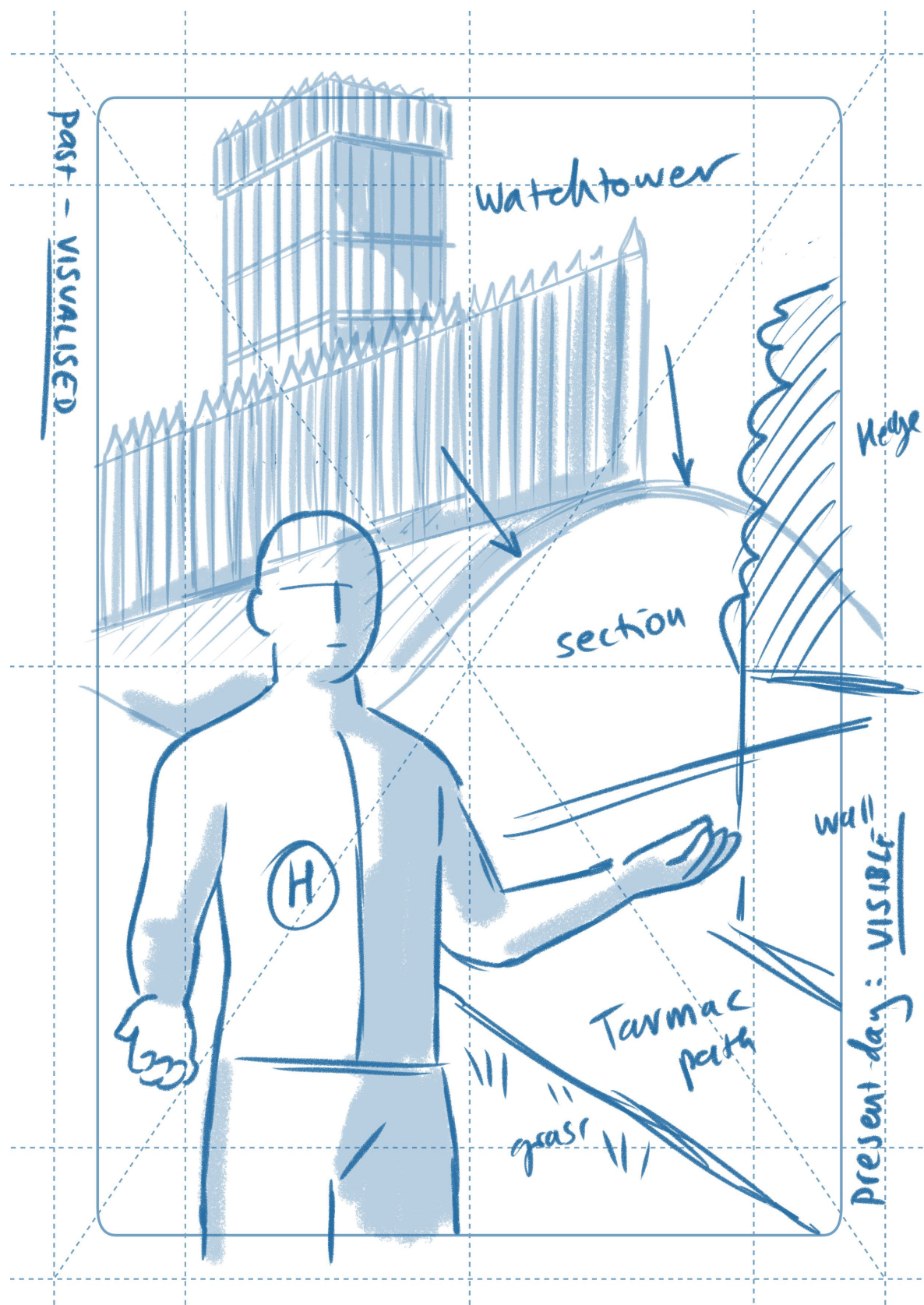[9]   https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/2020/04/06/_roundup/

Figure 5: Rough draft of comic panel for Wat's Dyke map leaflet (John G. Swogger)
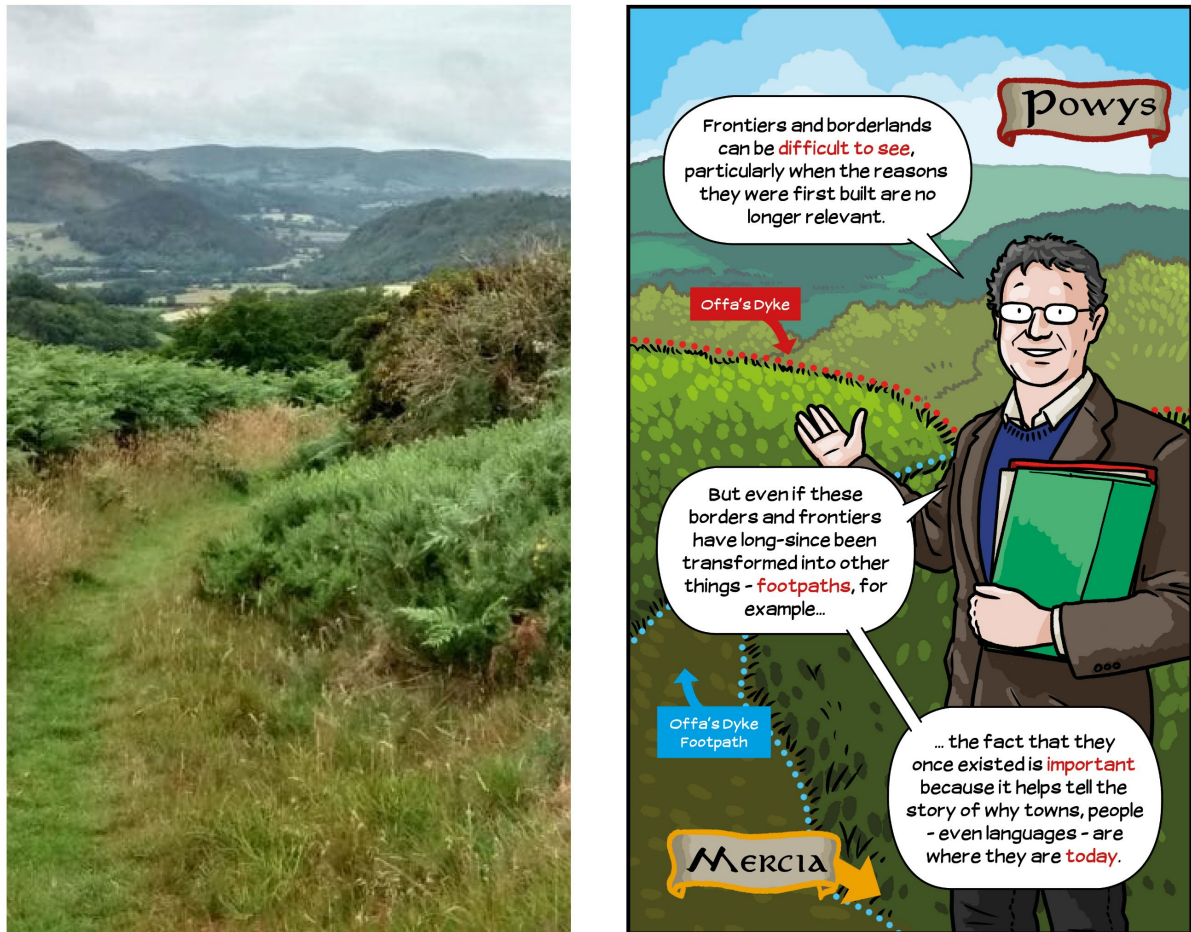
Figure 6: Comic panel and photograph of Offa's Dyke, demonstrating how drawings can be annotated to enhance visibility of a monument and a narrator used to provide a researcher-fronted explanation (John G. Swogger)

During the Oswestry Heritage Comics project, it was both interesting and surprising to note the number of local people who, having become familiar with the format and content of the comics, came forward with suggestions for new strips. The project was planned with a long list of ideas for topics to be covered. But by the six-month mark, halfway through the project, that list was no longer needed: readers of the comics themselves had come forward with more than enough suggestions about what they would like to see in the series. The collected anthology (Swogger 2019b) demonstrates how the number of such stories increased as the series progressed, more often than not narrated by the person who had made the suggestion. These ranged from local heritage enthusiasts to full-time amateur researchers. Their participation not only expanded the number of stories the comics were able to tell, it expanded the *range* of stories which could be told: to include research and family biography that was important to the story of Oswestry, but unlikely to make its way into any mainstream narrative of the town's history. Through these conversations, the comics became a dialogue, as local researchers moved beyond being simply informants to become collaborators and colleagues (Swogger 2019a: 155; Swogger 2020). Such forms of engagement can be enabled by the collaborative nature of the medium of comics itself (cf. Brienza *et al.* 2016: 126), at once inclusively validating enthusiasm and interest in local heritage without forcing it to conform to 'elite' models of scholarly communication (cf. Perry 2018: 223–224, Atalay 2012: 118, Swogger 2000: 129–131). Through the use of comics as a collaborative process as well as a medium, it became clear that local communities were already engaged with their heritage. In many instances, this was in ways significantly different from academic historians and archaeologists. It became clear, for

Figure 7: Four panels from a tribal community NAGPRA comics workshop. They were drawn as part of an exercise on what the term "heritage" meant to the participants. In these four panels, participants drew comics which connected "heritage" to traditional spirituality, community mental health, school truancy and dawning political awareness. Redrawn by J.Swogger, 2020 (cf. Barry 2014)

example, that many local people understand Old Oswestry hillfort much more in terms of its importance as a place where one goes for a walk 'to clear one's head' and get away from the pressures of everyday life (Evans 2019: 2), as a green space and an ecological refuge in an increasingly urbanised landscape, or as a focus for art and creative engagements, community volunteering or pride (Swogger 2019b: 3, 12, 15, 19, 35, 37, 41, 44, 47, 50, also Evans 2019) before they then understand it as a significant archaeological or historical space.

A dialogic approach that helps reveal how communities envisage the local past can help design more relevant approaches to comics-based communications. In the United States, a collaborative project between the University of Colorado and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Native American communities in Michigan and North Dakota has created comics about the repatriation of Native American sacred items from museum collections back to tribes. These comics have been written in collaboration with tribal members, historians and archaeologists, as well as other community members. The aim has been to communicate to archaeological and non-archaeological audiences – as well as Native and non-Native audiences – why and how repatriations take place, and why they are so important.[10] There is a great deal of archaeological and legal information to communicate, and – as each comic is based on a set of case-studies – a great deal of

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[10] https://nagpracomics.weebly.com/

personal testimony from the repatriation participants to communicate as well. During a research trip to Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota to work with tribal historians and language specialists of the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara nation, community workshops were used to show how comics about subjects raised by NAGPRA were written and illustrated.[11] During the workshop exercises, participants quickly moved from the rather narrow definition of 'heritage' suggested by the NAGPRA stories, to one which included everything from education and sports achievement to language revitalisation and political activism. In narrating the importance of 'heritage', participants' daily and personal engagement with the past naturally segued into other kinds of engagements: hobbies and past-times, family and friends, travel and business, aspirations and worries about the future. In these community comics workshops, it was possible to witness first-hand how 'the past' could not always be presented simply in terms of objective, academic information, but was inextricably linked – as well as given meaning and context – through connections with other aspects of community life (Figure 7). In the Pacific island nation of Palau, this approach is being used on a collaborative and connected project framework for comics about the impact of climate change on cultural heritage that frames archaeological data and historical narrative within the community's own understanding of their past (Swogger in press). New NAGPRA comics projects with the Kumeyaay tribes in California and the White Earth Chippewa in the Midwest, are now structured so that community comics workshops – focusing not just on heritage, but on community issues more widely – are an integral part of the project design (J. Shannon and M. Connolly, pers. comm.). While similar projects have been successful elsewhere (Brophy and Sackett 2019), and during the Oswestry Heritage Comics project (Swogger 2019b: 9), the NAGPRA projects have developed a broader, less specifically heritage-focused storytelling curriculum for community workshops (Shannon and Swogger 2019) which have been helpful in fostering a dialogic and empowered approach to collaborative heritage storytelling.

Exploring how communities and individuals in Wrexham already connect to their heritage beyond archaeological data and historical facts would enable a story about Wat's Dyke to be told that was both archaeologically and historically accurate, as well as relevant and meaningful. Workshops – perhaps organised around Dyke-related street or place-names, or businesses located on or near the Dyke, such as Morrisons, Erddig or the Maelor Hospital – that used comics as a medium to explore both aspects could be incorporated into onward projects as a way to work on a broad and inclusive biography of Wat's Dyke in partnership with local communities, enabling their voices to be heard in the story of the Dyke and its landscapes.

Such a story may well need more than a single leaflet; a longer-form narrative, perhaps, created with the express intention of taking the story beyond the environs of the Dyke itself – beyond guidebooks and maps and interpretation boards, and into other, more 'vernacular' spaces within the community. Rather than frame the act of visiting the monument as the only meaningful context for information about the Dyke, the process of creating a longer-form, community-informed work might suggest new spaces for public-facing information away from the problematically-(in)visible monument. Just as the now-vanished railway heritage of Wrexham is commemorated in photographic displays in the Morrisons supermarket which stands on the former yard site, so too might a more broadly-visualised story of Wat's Dyke be commemorated in the Premier Inn or the Wrexham football club grounds. Comics lend themselves to display and presentation of heritage information in local contexts where text-only, jargon-heavy information may struggle (Swogger 2019a). This includes display spaces away from sites and museums, print spaces such as local newspapers and community noticeboards, and digital spaces such as local history pages on social media. Such presentations could bring the complexity of the Wat's Dyke story – of linear earthworks as part of local borderland as well as both 'English' and 'Welsh' national stories, of wider comparative international stories of conflict, territoriality, ideology and identity in frontier zones past and present – to audiences who might find new and unexpected meanings in them, and a new and unexpected reason to value the archaeology and heritage from which those stories spring.

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[11] https://nagpracomics.weebly.com/project-updates/comics-workshops-at-mandan-hidatsa-arikara-nation

The ability of comics to meld context and explanation, to unravel and re-present complex subjects and yet remain engaging and accessible, means it has the potential to bring more than just clear explanations to the issues surrounding Wat's Dyke (cf. Witek 1989: 153). Through dialogue with community voices, through the use of novel arenas for debate and conversation, comics could become a 'common language to discuss archaeological and cultural heritage issues' (Atalay 2012: 180) such as wider issues of preservation, conservation, and interpretation not just of Wat's Dyke, but other aspects of Wrexham's history with which it intersects.

Future directions and further applications

There are interesting connections to be explored between comics and other forms of outreach media: animation being the most obvious. There has always been a strong historical and popular culture link between printed comics and animation – Tintin, Asterix and Marvel superheroes have all started life as printed comic books before being adapted as animated shorts or full-length films. The advent of digital animation technologies has made the process of adapting comics to animation significantly cheaper, easier and quicker than it once was. The rise of freely-accessible video sharing sites online, and the ease with which those are now integrated into social media makes it quick, easy and affordable to distribute animated video to a wide public audience. This all raises the possibility of creating animations based on Wat's Dyke comics which would increase their reach and diversify the scope of their public engagement. Indeed, even the process of creating the animations could become an opportunity for engagement. A 'Wat's Dyke Animation Project' could involve the media and graphics departments of schools and colleges in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, giving students a chance to shadow the project, using their own local heritage to learn skills and liaise with industry mentors. Video documentation of the process could be used to develop further levels of engagement, as well as link with local television and radio. Such a multi-media approach would enable communities to engage with the documentation, interpretation and presentation of Wat's Dyke in multiple ways, broadening the definition of the dyke as a community asset. Such a multi-media approach could also be specifically designed to integrate with other, existing public outreach and engagement programmes. Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) participants could be encouraged to get involved in the animation shadowing at school, for example, while any documentary video about the process of creating the animations would make appealing display content for the Offa's Dyke Centre, and so on. More broadly, such an approach could be specifically tailored to fit into local engagement forums – such as the "Special Offa" event at Trefonen in April 2020.

Indeed, it might be interesting to use the opportunities that developing a comic about Wat's Dyke present to explore how researchers could make better use in a more general sense of both visualisation and visual presentation in their work. Discussions about both Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke (and, indeed, other earthwork monuments) often draw upon interpretative visual assumptions that have never (or rarely) been visualised. In academic discourse, authors often appeal to their readers' visual imaginations in debating features such as gateways, bridges, roads, fortifications and on the position of earthwork monuments in the landscape (e.g. Ray and Bapty 2016: 236, 247, 255–257) but are rather more reluctant to put such visualisations down on paper. Hill and Worthington's use of 'comic strip sketches' to visualise the possibility of beacons, the use of ranging poles during construction and the landscape context of Offa's Dyke is a notable and laudable exception, making comics already part of the heritage of borderlands earthwork research (Hill and Worthington 2003: 113ff, a model for Swogger 2019a:147, see Figure 8). Archaeological reconstructions, like all scientific 'drawings', are often less about 'the way that they reflect or represent ideas, but more about the way that they construct those very ideas' (Moser 1998: 171) – partly by omission. Lack of visualisation can imply that there is no story to tell (cf. Frank 2012: 75), leading readers and researchers to resist challenging the assumptions of existing models. But, as such appeals to the imagination suggest – and as Alan Sorrell once so rightly observed – visualisation

Figure 8: An expanded 'comic strip sketch', demonstrating how the principle of using sequential illustrations can be used to help visualise complex archaeological, historical and contemporary processes which affect earthwork monuments (John G. Swogger)

is crucial to the process of archaeological interpretation, and '…cannot be properly considered without it.' (Sorrell 1981:20).

Yet it should also not simply be considered an afterthought; archaeological visualisation should be an integral part of the process of interpretation and reporting (Sorrell 1981: 22). Unlike in traditional reconstruction art, where "well-informed guesswork" is historically suspect (Dobie 2019: 27), comics present researchers with the opportunity to show and explain not just archaeological knowledge, but the process by which that knowledge is created - guesswork and all (Clark *et al.* 2019: 19). Including researchers as visible narrators of a comic about the work of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory is a step in this direction (Swogger 2019b: 42), but this can, and should, be taken much further. In talking about the use of comics to engage with 'community', one should not forget that those who research, conserve and protect earthwork monuments like Wat's Dyke are also a community. Comics can be a form of research methodology: synergies between words and pictures used to explore new ways of seeing relationships between textual and image-based information (Sousanis 2015:57ff). The structure of the Collaboratory and its meetings – in bringing together researchers, academics and field workers with a broad range of interests and backgrounds – lends itself perfectly, for example, to the running of visualisation workshops *as research*, sessions in which both the ideas and the construction of those ideas can be both worked on and recorded in visual format. Documentation of such sessions might then constitute both an important academic resource as well as an important outreach resource: helping both to clarify and codify archaeological interpretation of the dyke as well as explaining and presenting the process by which archaeological knowledge is created to a wider audience. There is no reason why such potential future directions should not be considered in the context of a broadly-applicable model for creative engagements with frontiers, borderlands and their monuments elsewhere across Europe and around the globe.

Conclusion

Comics offer more than simply a novel way to do public outreach for Wat's Dyke. The medium – its process as much as its product – offers the study of frontiers, borderlands and their associated monuments a toolset with which to address issues relating to paradoxical (in)visibility, shifting ontologies and problematised community engagement. That toolset can be used to drive practical, audience-led responses to the need and desire for clear and accessible information. And while the use of comics in public outreach about community heritage is a new field of both practice and research (Swogger 2019a), projects can be designed to be reflexive, able to adapt and respond to changing community feedback and needs, capable of showing what monuments like Wat's Dyke mean as 'heritage' beyond archaeology and history. Such approaches should also include the community of researchers around Wat's Dyke and other earthwork monuments, and the visual explanations that are integral to their work. They should also include connections to other media and forms of visualisation discourse, such as professional-level visual workshopping, and be conceptualised as part of a model with applications beyond the earthwork monuments of the English-Welsh borderlands.

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