

# Offa's Dyke Journal

Volume 3 for 2021

## 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](mailto:howard.williams@chester.ac.uk)

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

## Editorial Board

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- Frauke Witte Dipl. Prähist. (Curator, Museum of Southern Jutland (MSJ))

Submissions: [odj@chester.ac.uk](mailto:odj@chester.ac.uk)

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Edited by Howard Williams and Liam Delaney



University of  
Chester



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# Collaboratory through Crises: Researching Linear Monuments in 2021

Howard Williams

*This article introduces the third volume of the Offa's Dyke Journal (ODJ). As well as reviewing ODJ 3's contents, I present reviews of the journal received to date, notable new publications on linear monuments, and the Collaboratory's key activities during 2021. The context and significance of the research network's ongoing endeavours are presented set against intersecting academic and public crises affecting the study and public's engagement with past frontiers and borderlands.*

*Keywords:* borderlands, Collaboratory, crises, frontiers, linear earthworks

## Introduction

Providing a dedicated venue for new research on the early medieval frontiers and borderlands of the island of Britain, the *Offa's Dyke Journal (ODJ)* is also the first and only open-access peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to the investigation of frontiers and borderlands in deep-time perspective. The journal's remit spans detailed and original explorations into landscapes, earthworks, monuments and material culture. Exploring specific themes and issues in the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands in comparative and global perspective, *ODJ* is edited and produced under the auspices of the interdisciplinary research network, the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory, and funded by the University of Chester and the Offa's Dyke Association.

Each volume to date includes both original peer-reviewed work as well as 'classics revisited' papers. The latter are articles which have been re-edited, formatted and re-published with permission, often with revised and augmented maps and images. The aim is to make these works of enduring merit available to fresh audiences and accessible through an open-access digital format for the first time. In this task, the journal editors – Howard Williams (HW) and Liam Delaney (LD) – have been ably assisted by our digital publisher: JAS Arqueología. Furthermore, archaeological publishers Archaeopress have generously agreed to sell and distribute print copies of *ODJ* as well as host free downloads on their own website.

*ODJ's* existing editorial board has been further enhanced by leading experts in relevant themes and debates central to the journal's remit working across disciplines (see masthead for details). The editorial board will provide expert guidance and support for the editors as well as shape the direction of the journal into the future. Each issue is supported by the hard work of expert anonymous referees. Their invaluable evaluations of manuscripts have sustained the journal's character and quality.

## Past volumes: volume 1 for 2019 and volume 2 for 2020<sup>1</sup>

Volume 1 for 2019 presented both the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory and *ODJ* via an introductory article by the editors. Four original peer-reviewed articles followed: two presenting fresh investigations of early medieval linear monuments in western Britain (by Paul Belford for Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, and Andy Seaman on Llywarch Hen's Dyke), one on the results of new fieldwork on the Danevirke (by Astrid Tummuscheit and Frauke Witte), and a further article on the heritage interpretation of linear earthworks and borderlands using the example of the Oswestry Heritage Comics Project (by John Swogger). *ODJ* 1 also contained two 'classics revisited' pieces: one by Ann Williams on historical sources and archaeological evidence for Offa's Dyke and the other by Margaret Worthington Hill reviewing her interpretations of Wat's Dyke.

Volume 2 for 2020 was opened by a review of the Collaboratory's 2020 activities. This was set in the wider context of the challenges of both the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns as well as the specific moves to decolonise the British landscape in play during 2020. Following this, *ODJ* 2 contained four original peer-reviewed articles addressing the history of studying linear earthworks (Mark Bell), the pseudoarchaeology of linear monuments (Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews), heritage interpretation and contemporary reception using the case study of the Faesten Dic, Joyden's Wood, Kent (Ethan Doyle White) and an investigation of the place-names associated with Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke in the Welsh Marches (HW). Again, these were joined by two 'classics revisited' articles: David Hill on the northernmost stretches of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke and Tim Malim on Grim's Ditch and Wansdyke.

## Published reviews of the journal's volumes 1 and 2

I would like to note two published reviews offering critical acclaim for *ODJ* volumes 1 and 2 which I share here to reflect on the standing of the publication. Eminent Roman frontiers expert Professor David Breeze wrote in *Current Archaeology* that *ODJ* was an:

exciting new development, challenging past practices whereby reports on individual monuments might be published in a range of local and national journals. This is especially important with linear monuments – Roman frontiers just as much as Offa's Dyke – where there is a lot of dispersed information... [It] is good news for the researcher who will now be able to find all their material between two covers. (Breeze 2021)

Breeze concludes his generous review by wishing us well with our new venture and noting that the papers meet our editorial aspirations and that the journal is 'attractively produced' (Breeze 2021).

The second review is by archaeologist Tim Malim in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, the journal of the Cambrian Archaeological Association. Reviewing both volumes 1 and 2, Malim

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, citations to articles in *ODJ* 1 and 2 are excluded from the bibliography.

vindicates the Collaboratory’s vision for the publication when he states (echoing Breeze): ‘The benefits of bringing many papers on this topic together into a single journal will facilitate future research and should generate collective debate’. Malim perceives *ODJ* as an ‘altruistic attempt to join up the many individuals who have an interest in dykes, for research, for management, and for public enjoyment, so that understanding can be enhanced into what issues and approaches should be adopted for ensuring the future investigation and safeguarding of these enigmatic monuments’ (Malim 2021: 283). He regards volume 1 as ‘an exceptional series of articles...’

I would like to take this opportunity to explain one minor misunderstanding presented in Malim’s review: that one of the photographs in David Hill’s 1991 book chapter republished in *ODJ* 2 was accidentally not reproduced (Malim 2021: 286). This was not the case; we decided to omit one of the original photographs showing excavations at Sychdyn due to its poor quality. Our footnote 1 for the article explicitly stating: ‘... this last photograph is of such poor quality that its reproduction in this venue is thought to have no merit.’ (Hill 2020: 141). The confusion presumably arose from Malim reviewing the print version of *ODJ* 2 which inadvertently failed to publish this explanatory footnote.

In summary, the editors did not anticipate *ODJ* receiving reviews in other publications. Both the evaluations of Breeze and Malim are very welcome. Together they demonstrate the necessity and merits of this open-access digital publication initiative.

### Volume 3 for 2021<sup>2</sup>

This volume, *ODJ* 3 for 2021, is a further and significant landmark in the journal. This is not only because of the high-quality and distinctive merits of each individual article. It also relates to the scale and variety of the contents and the new projects they report on, from doctoral research to large collaborative (multi-institutional) research projects. In addition, it is a remarkable achievement for all concerned given that the incredibly challenging circumstances of 2021 have affected both authors and editors in multiple regards.

This volume begins with a ‘classics revisited’ piece by Paolo Squatriti, originally published in 2001 and titled ‘Patrons, landscape, and potlatch: the case of Bulgaria and England in the Early Middle Ages’. Twenty years on, this article is still pertinent. It has been revised, updated and republished with new images, plus a map by Liam Delaney, with the permission of the author, the original editors (Pamela Berger, Jeffery Howe and Susan A. Michalczyk), and the original publisher Peter Lang. Squatriti takes a comparative perspective on Offa’s Dyke (Wales and England) and the Erkesiya (Bulgaria), considering both monuments to be expressions of royal power and authority in their respective contexts of early medieval statecraft.

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<sup>2</sup> As with articles in volumes 1 and 2, formal citations to articles in volume 3 are omitted.

Lead authored by Keith Ray and drawing together new insights and observations in collaboration with a range of amateur groups and professionals between 2016 and 2020 in various locations from Gloucestershire to Flintshire, 'Offa's Dyke: A Continuing Journey of Discovery' builds on Ray and Bapty's (2016) survey and interpretation of Offa's Dyke. The article presents interim results on multiple new proposed lengths of Offa's Dyke in both the Wye Valley in the south and between the Alyn Valley and Prestatyn in the north. The article also communicates new insights into the design, composition and placement of Offa's Dyke in Montgomeryshire and Shropshire. Together, Ray *et al.* show how much more there remains to discern and learn about Britain's longest linear monument.

Debates persist regarding the age and original farthest extent of Offa's Dyke. LD's article complements the article by Ray *et al.* by making a further significant methodological contribution. Investigating Lidar data, LD makes a series of fresh observations which transform our understanding of Offa's Dyke's route, extent and placement in the early medieval landscape. The results show convincingly for the first time that Offa's Dyke originally ran near-continuously south-east from Rushock Hill, still discussed by some as the southern end of Offa's Dyke's principal stretches, across the Hereford plain to the River Wye. LD's work also contributes to our understanding of the Wye as a natural frontier thereon. More than demonstrating the potential of his method and extend the known course of Offa's Dyke, LD's article has wider implications for approaching why, how, where, when and what these linear earthworks were constructed.

What was the precise function of Offa's Dyke? The scale and placement of Offa's Dyke are the focus of a new GIS analysis focused on a key stretch of the monument at Llanfair Hill, Llanfair Waterdine, Clun Forest, Shropshire by David A. Humphreys. Comparing the scale of this well-preserved section of Offa's Dyke with other early medieval linear earthworks – East Wansdyke and Devil's Dyke – Humphreys shows that Offa's Dyke, while still monumental, is relatively slight in scale. Meanwhile, his GIS viewshed analysis systematically identifies that Offa's Dyke did not adopt a position in the landscape to prioritise a west-facing visual envelope. Together, these factors argue against considering Offa's Dyke as primarily a military installation.

Nicky Garland, Barney Harris, Tom Moore and Andrew Reynolds provide a further comparative perspective in both spatial and chronological terms. They report on the first phase of an important and distinctive new project exploring Britain's linear earthworks dating to the first millennium BC through to the Early Middle Ages in comparative terms: 'Monumentality and Landscape: Linear Earthworks in Britain' funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Following a valuable survey of past research, they introduce the project and address issues of definition and interpretation. They identify the principal case studies and present preliminary observations from South East Britain. The project aims to pursue these observations further through fresh field investigations and analytical mapping leading towards the publication of the *Atlas of Linear Earthworks in Britain*.

Attention then shifts next to Offa's Dyke's shorter neighbour – Wat's Dyke – in a triad of original contributions. HW considers this linear monument as an element of a hydraulic frontier zone and reconsiders the earthwork's relationship with land routes as well as watercourses, wetlands and the Dee Estuary by considering its orchestration of local, middle-range and long-distance mobilities. Then, HW and John Swogger present their new collaboration for interpreting the monument for people today: *What's Wat's Dyke?: Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail*. Finally, building on a preliminary rationale published in *Public Archaeologies of Frontiers and Borderlands* (Gleave *et al.* 2021), John Swogger and HW co-author a critical reflection on the collaborative practice and process of making the *What's Wat's Dyke?* comic.

Together, the range of fresh research presented in *ODJ 3* reveal the many original avenues available for exploring linear earthworks as well as investigating their landscape contexts and via comparative perspectives. The articles also address how we build fresh avenues of public engagement and heritage interpretation for linear earthworks.

### New research on linear earthworks published elsewhere

The introductions to both *ODJ 1* and *2* considered new publications on aspects of frontiers and borderlands focusing on linear earthworks. I continue the tradition here in order to place the articles in *ODJ 3* in context. While there are other relevant new academic publications, five studies show how research on linear earthworks is by no means restricted to this journal.

In a fresh collection on mobility in prehistory, Emily Fiocpprile (2021) evaluates the linear earthworks of the Yorkshire Wolds. Focusing on using GIS Least Cost modelling of the Huggate Dykes, she evaluates their relationship with the movement of people and animals between locales. Alongside Murrieta-Flores and Williams (2017), Williams and Delaney (in *ODJ 1*) and Humphreys (this volume), Fiocpprile demonstrates the potential of GIS analyses for refined understandings of how linear earthworks operated to choreograph past mobilities on a range of scales.

Blaise Vyner (2021) presents an evaluation of an 'enigmatic earthwork boundary' bisecting the western tip of St David's Head, Pembrokeshire, Ffos y Mynach ('the monk's dyke'). Following a detailed and critical evaluation of past research and new mapping, Vyner postulates two phases of earthwork construction, both possibly dating to Irish settlement in South West Wales in the fifth or sixth centuries AD. Notably, in addition to evaluating the dyke's interaction with historic land routes, Vyner gives due attention to how the dyke carefully follows watercourses across the peninsula but also how it afforded control over usable landing beaches, emphasising its connection to seaborne travel. In this regard, while a far smaller earthwork in terms of magnitude and length, and therefore of likely different authorship, date and function, Vyner's evaluation finds parallels in the 'hydraulic' perspective offered by Williams in this volume. Specifically, Vyner might not

be fully accurate to regard Ffos y Mynach as 'exceptional in utilising watery areas and watercourses' (Vyner 2021: 101).

Keith Ray (2021) contributes to the volume edited by Heather James and Toby Driver celebrating 175 years of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* called *Illustrating the Past in Wales*. Ray provides a succinct review of Cyril Fox's contributions to the systematic surveying of both Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke. Together with the contributions by Bell and Fitzpatrick-Matthews to *ODJ 2*, Ray's illustrated essay emphasises the importance of critical evaluations of the history of research into linear monuments, including theories, methods and practice.

A further notable publication deserves comment for its integration of recent research on Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke into a broader historical narrative. Marc Morris' *Anglo-Saxons* (2021) counters seeing Offa's Dyke as a military barrier and following Squatriti (2002) and Ray and Bapty (2016) argues for its significance as an expression of Offa's power and authority (Morris 2021: 136) and also he regards the Dyke as reflecting, and perhaps constituting, a sharpening sense of English ethnicity – shared economic, cultural, religious as well as political affinities between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – in opposition to the Britons to the west. Morris argues this was instigated by Offa's hegemony south of the Humber (Morris 2021: 167–168). Regarding Offa's Dyke as a mechanism for engineering hegemony but also ethnogenesis certainly requires further exploration in relation to place-name, archaeological as well as historical sources. Morris is to be commended for (albeit briefly) not completely forgetting Wat's Dyke (Morris 2021: 134, 144, 179).

Complementing these reviews and discussions of ancient linear earthworks, Louisa Campbell (2021) considers how linear monuments can be mobilised to counter colonial narratives in the contemporary world. Complementing recent contributions on the significance of prehistoric, Roman and early medieval monuments in contemporary perceptions and engagements with frontiers and borderlands (Gleave *et al.* 2020), Campbell identifies creative ways in which postcolonial discourses might be materialised for the Antonine Wall. Focusing on replicas of the Distance Sculptures commissioned by the Rediscovering the Antonine Wall Project, she identifies how they serve 'as an effective vehicle to subvert and flip colonial narratives and reframe the stories told in the stones' about the Roman frontier (for context, see also Jones 2020). Campbell's insights, specifically regard how communities can be critically engaged in impactful ways through replicas can be seen as contrusively interplaying with the discussions by Swogger article in *ODJ 1*, Williams on decolonising linear monuments in *ODJ 2*, and Swogger and Williams in this volume. It is clear that the future promises many opportunities for new media and strategies of public engagement to foster fresh readings of the stories of past frontier works and linear monuments. As Brophy (2021) rightly posits, our work must, however, challenge simplistic colonial, nationalistic and indigeneity narratives which often compete and conflict through the heritage conservation, management and interpretation of linear monuments and their associated artefacts, sites, monuments and landscape contexts.

Having reviewed the content and context of the journal and its third volume, and then identified further examples of new studies on pertinent themes, I next survey the public engagement activities of the Collaboratory in 2021.

### Collaboratory activities in 2021

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions affecting Wales and England, archaeological fieldwork and face-to-face activities has been limited during 2021. Desk-based research and public engagement activities have been also impeded and curtailed. Collaboratory activities have been thus rather restricted and no new specialist or public events have been planned since the April 2020 ‘Special Offa’ public conference adapted for digital delivery at short notice. However, the Collaboratory has remained active through digital media and a host of activities are in preparation for the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in 2022. Moreover, the Collaboratory convenors and members have initiated and contributed to a range of socially distanced face-to-face activities and initiatives as well as digital engagements linked to the research network’s principal aims. The brief summary here makes no claims at being exhaustive and the Offa’s Dyke Association’s range of activities is far broader still, including the important development of setting up an Offa’s Dyke Rescue Fund to support the monument’s conservation and management for future generations.<sup>3</sup>

As well as contributing to the aforementioned publications and *ODJ* itself, the WordPress blog *The Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory* has been an active venue for disseminating insights by Collaboratory members.<sup>4</sup> Notable among these are four posts by Professor Keith Ray collectively titled ‘How much work was involved in building the Dykes of the Mercian frontier?’ (Ray 2021b–e). Further reflections on the construction, composition and placement of Offa’s Dyke (Williams 2021a–b) and the afterlife, heritage, art and waymarkers of the monument (Williams 2021c–f). Wat’s Dyke has not been neglected: 2021 has seen a post by Collaboratory member Culann Robinson on ‘The Hidden Heritage of Wat’s Dyke’ (Robinson 2021) and another considers the experience of visiting Wat’s Dyke between Hope and Penyffordd, Flintshire where no footpath follows the monument itself but a series of paths bisect its line (Williams 2021g). Together, these examples illustrate the enduring value of blogging as a media to encourage interim and innovative discussions of linear monuments as well as to show-case new voices.

Professor Keith Ray also dedicated himself to the creation of the new bilingual exhibition at the Offa’s Dyke Centre in collaboration with David McGlade and others involved in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/offas-dyke-rescue-fund>

<sup>4</sup> In 2021, posts by Williams on his *Archaeodeath* WordPress blog on linear earthworks have not been consistently translated to *The Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory*. While rectified in December 2021, some of the citations herein refer to the *Archaeodeath* versions to more accurately reflect when they were first composed and disseminated online.



Figure 1: The new exhibition in the Offa's Dyke Centre. 1a (above): Julian Ravest (left) and Professor Keith Ray (right) discuss the exhibition including a drone photograph of Hergan Corner (Clun Forest, Shropshire) by Ravest. 1b (below) the 'Border Communities and the Dykes' featuring photographs by Howard Williams (Photographs: Howard Williams)

the Offa's Dyke Association. This exhibition is not formally open and so I will refrain from a detailed review here. Still, it is necessary to commend the wealth and detail of information it contains through its text and images, including the latest research and ideas about Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke. The displays tell the story of the monuments from the Early Middle Ages but also their significance today. The aim is for the formal launch of the exhibition by Easter 2022, but those who attended the Offa's Dyke Path's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations (see below) had a brief opportunity for a preview (Figure 1a and b).

Another heritage initiative derives from the collaboration of archaeological illustrator John G. Swogger and HW: the 'What's Wat's Dyke? Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail. Initially launched in July 2021 in English as part of the Council for British Archaeology's (CBA) Festival of Archaeology (Williams 2021h) and the Welsh medium version, was subsequently launched in December 2021, translated by Dave Andrews (Williams 2021i).

New heritage interpretation panels funded and designed by



Figure 2: The new carved bench (left) and interpretation panel (right) on Offa's Dyke at Home Farm, Chirk Castle (Photographs: Howard Williams)

other organisations also feature the latest developments of the heritage interpretation of the Anglo-Welsh borderland landscapes. The National Trust's efforts to interpret Offa's Dyke at Chirk Castle (Figure 2) follow a critique by HW in 2016 regarding the complete absence of heritage interpretation for visitors (Williams 2015). Meanwhile, the new heritage interpretation board in the Greenfield Valley on Wat's Dyke (Figure 3) has appeared subsequent to HW identifying the limited interpretation of the monument here and elsewhere along the monument's line (Williams 2020). Both interpretation panels have received critical review on the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory blog (Williams (2021j–k).



Figure 3: The new interpretation panel for Wat's Dyke at Strand Coed, Greenfield Valley, Holywell, already subjected to graffiti (Photographs: Howard Williams)

A further topic of reflection relevant to the Collaboratory was the relatively small-scale but intense controversy following a tweet by English Heritage on 3 October 2021



Figure 4: The logo for the 'Walking with Offa' exhibition by Dan Llywelyn Hall (Photograph: Howard Williams)

from the Tidenham stretch of Offa's Dyke at the Devil's Pulpit which failed to mention the view was ostensibly of Wales and including the Cadw site of Tintern Abbey. Reflecting on the challenges of digital engagement and on-site heritage interpretation, Williams (2021l) evaluated the digital reactions, the missed opportunity of this instance for education and engagement regarding the significance of Offa's Dyke, as well as the ongoing challenges of political discourses vying over the

meaning and significance of the monument and its landscape context.

Collaboratory convenors have also contributed in the media, including Keith Ray being quoted in *The Guardian* regarding Offa's Dyke (Rushby 2021). Meanwhile, HW and Collaboratory member Mel Roxby-Mackey were among those who appeared on the ITV Wales 'Wonders of the Border' television programme hosted by Sean Fletcher exploring the Wales-England border and following the Offa's Dyke Path from south to north. Filming in September 2019 at Lippets Grove near the Devil's Pulpit in Gloucestershire, HW talked about Offa's Dyke's function and significance in episode 1 (Williams 2021m). It is also important to note the range of talks by Collaboratory convenors including Dr Paul Belford regarding Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust's latest work on prehistoric hillforts and linear earthworks, disseminated online (Belford 2021; see also Williams 2021n) as well as HW exploring the 'wall that made Wales' on History Hit's *Gone Medieval* podcast (Williams 2021o).

Engaging the public face-to-face was not completely foregone during 2021. For instance, Collaboratory member Ray Bailey gave guided tours through the Greenfield Valley stretches of Wat's Dyke to coincide with the CBA Festival of Archaeology. Notably, 2021 was the year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Offa's Dyke Path, and this involved not only long-term digital profile-raising videos and digital activity by the National Trail, but also a memorable day of events and activities at the Offa's Dyke Centre at Knighton on 10 July 2021 (Offa's Dyke Association 2021). The day was marked by a series of artistic and creative interactions with the monument and the long-distance national trail, including a memorial walk, music and poetry as well as a viewing of Dan Llywelyn Hall's artworks inspired by the monument: 'Walking with Offa' (Figure 4; see also the front cover illustration of the commemorative stained glass window unveiled on this day). This event coincided with



Figure 5: The 50th anniversary logo on the memorial bench on Panponton Hill, Clun Forest, Shropshire (Photograph: Howard Williams)



Figure 6: The new memorial plaque appended to the monolith at Pinners Hole to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail (Photograph: Howard Williams)

the publication of a new book of poetry and art to commemorate the anniversary (Hall *et al.* 2021). As well as anniversary way markers being fixed along the Path (Figure 5), a new plaque was appended to the memorial stone marking the opening of the path at Pinners Hole adjacent to the Centre (Figure 6; see Williams 2021p for a review).

Together, these events and activities show the host of the Collaboratory is working alongside a host of organisations and individuals in creative, culturally engaged ways to explore linear monuments and former frontier. Significantly, these involve communities living in their shadow and visitors alike as well as interacting with wider political discourses.

### Weathering a storm of crises

The Collaboratory has endured through multiple interleaving crises during 2021. By way of conclusion I would like to end by reflecting on these dimensions in considering the future of the research network.

Set against the background of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic, political and health challenges, exacerbated by the climate crisis and the ongoing ramifications of Brexit, British archaeology has faced a series of specific threats over this past year. Issues include

reduced museum funding and closures, strained and reduced national, regional and local government support for archaeology, as well as the commercial sector facing employment shortages, poor levels of pay, a raft of issues regarding working conditions and the threat of new planning legislation. Across UK academia, but especially the humanities, leading experts are losing their jobs and well-respected and long-term research and teaching units in Archaeology and History are being cut and closed, including archaeology programmes at the University of Sheffield and the University of Worcester.

These threats are all taking place within a growing 'culture war' regarding how the British landscape is conserved, managed and interpreting for current and future generations. The National Trust in particular has been embroiled in debates over its attempts to recognise the colonial legacies of its properties (e.g. Thorpe and Tapper 2021). This is interleaving with the aforementioned impact of Brexit, the climate crisis, a continued immigration crisis, growing nationalism, and a time when concepts of race and ethnicity, nationhood and the countryside are foci of intense debate and politicised rhetoric. This has created a powder keg situation regarding the mobilisation of ancient borders in contemporary political discourse. For example, in a speech at the COP2020 summit, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson explicitly and falsely framed the climate crisis as a threat of uncontrolled immigration akin to the supposed fate of the Western Roman Empire (Cunliffe 2021).

Select aspects of these challenges are briefly reviewed in *British Archaeology* magazine 180 for September and October 2021. The front cover question identifies a gloomy situation: 'Who would be an archaeologist?' and 'The crisis facing the profession'. Mike Pitts' editorial identifies 'a sense of doom has been spreading over archaeology like a plague' (Pitts 2021). Within, the article 'What future for archaeology in Britain?' sketches the popular appeal for archaeology and the challenges we face. Leading names in archaeology and cognate disciplines lend their names to the value of the discipline (Duckworth 2021).

Superficially, it seems that UK archaeology is stepping up to these daunting challenges. However, it remains unclear whether archaeologists and cognate disciplines can 'work together with a common vision' (Duckworth 2021: 34). Indeed, there have been efforts from within to curtail campaigning for the academic discipline's future (thePipeline 2021; Williams 2021q). As such, the UK academic archaeology sector's future remains uncertain and lacking an agreed singular vision and public strategy to advocate and campaign for its own existence. In this situation, the future of academic input into initiatives such as the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory is uncertain.

How does all these circumstances directly pertain to the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory and the future of this journal? Three simple points. First, in the current political and socio-economic context, never has detailed interdisciplinary research about Britain's past in comparative perspective been more urgently required. This includes rich, informed and critical evaluations of linear earthworks and their frontier and borderland contexts. Second, equally, never has it been more important to sustain an open-access academic resource as a venue dedicated

to exploring the complex story of frontiers and borderlands from prehistory to the present-day to inform academic debates but also public discourse. In this contemporary whirlwind of crises, the enduring ancient banks and ditches of dykes silently look on, some forgotten, some half-remembered, but some increasingly drawn into the fray as debating tools and sometimes as weapons. The Collaboratory has a pivotal role in informing and challenging misuses of linear monuments in contemporary society. Hence, third and finally, this work cannot continue if there is not support for it within and beyond the archaeology and heritage communities and associated stakeholder communities. The research network's labour and endeavours certainly cannot proceed in a never-ending climate of toxicity and hostile attacks on the humanities in general, and archaeology in particular. We stand on a precipice, on a linear, looking out over various and uncertain futures. For now, however, the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory shall endure and endeavour to overcome.

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Howard Williams, Professor of Archaeology, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ, UK

Email: [howard.williams@chester.ac.uk](mailto:howard.williams@chester.ac.uk)