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Llywarch Hen's Dyke: Place and Narrative in Early Medieval Wales

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Dykes must have been important features within the early medieval landscape, but scarcely attract more than cursory discussion in archaeological literature focused on Wales and western Britain. Analysis of a dyke recorded in a boundary clause attached to an eighth century charter in the Book of Llandaff demonstrates how a multidisciplinary approach can garner new insights into the function and significance of dykes in the early medieval landscape. Llywarch Hen's Dyke defined a large part of the bounds of Llan-gors, a royal estate in the kingdom of Brycheiniog. On the ground the dyke is represented by a prominent agricultural land boundary, but the monument also operated as a 'mnemonic peg' through which oral traditions associated with power and place were narrated.

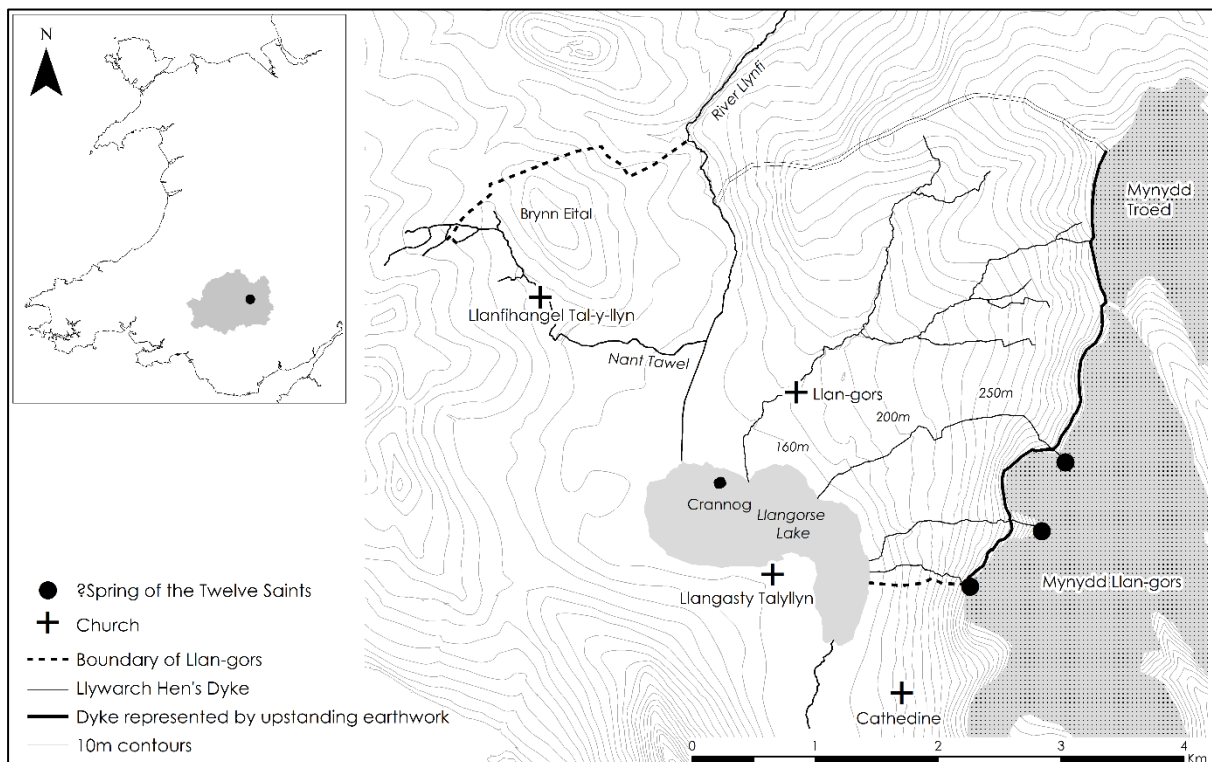
Linear earthworks have rarely been afforded more than cursory discussions in the recent archaeological literature on early medieval Wales (e.g. Arnold and Davies 2000; Edwards 1997; Davies 1982). However, dykes of various forms must have been a common feature within the landscape of early medieval western Britain, which has led to their identification, analysis, and interpretation being identified as research priorities (Edwards *et al* 2017: 32). This article aims to demonstrate how a multidisciplinary approach can provide new insights into the function and significance of dykes in the early medieval landscape; focusing on a dyke that is recorded in the boundary clause of charter 146 in the *Book of Llandaff* (Evans and Rhys 1979: 146). This charter records the supposed donation of an estate at Llan-gors (Powys) by King Awst of Brycheiniog, and his sons, sometime in the early to mid-eighth century AD, although the boundary clause probably dates to the early eleventh century (Davies 1979: 98; Coe 2004). Llan-gors can be identified as an important royal and latterly ecclesiastical estate, associated with a monastery and unique crannog (an artificial island residence) interpreted as a seat of the Kings of Brycheiniog during the late ninth and early tenth centuries (Lane and Redknap *in press*). The dyke is described as *Claud Lyuarch hen* (Llywarch Hen's Dyke), a direct reference to Llywarch Hen, a legendary Brittonic ruler who features prominently in medieval Welsh poetic tradition (Sims-Williams 1993: 51–54). It is argued here that Llywarch's dyke can be identified as a *pen-clawdd* (head-dyke), an agricultural land boundary. However, whilst this earthwork offered little in terms of physical defence, the monument and the oral traditions associated are interpreted as performing a didactic role that reinforced knowledge of the boundary of the royal estate and of the status, power, and obligations of those who held it.

Source Material: Charter 146 in the Book of Llandaff

The Llandaff charters are the largest collection of early medieval charters from Wales, and they provide rare evidence for a period with an otherwise very ephemeral historical and archaeological record (Davies 1979). The charters are complex sources however, and it is necessary to briefly consider them before exploring the evidence from charter 146. The *Book of Llandaff* is an early twelfth-century collection of documents relating to the purported early history of the Norman See at Llandaff (Glamorgan). It includes 158 charters that claim to record grants of property made in favour of the see between the sixth and the eleventh centuries. The *Book* was compiled under the influence of Urban, the first bishop of Llandaff appointed under Norman rule, who was at the time of its compilation pursuing a series of disputes over diocesan boundaries and episcopal properties with the bishops of Hereford and St David's (Davies 2003: 17–26). The charters were compiled to support Urban's legal campaign and are demonstrably fraudulent within this twelfth-century context (Brooke 1986: 16–49). Nevertheless, Wendy Davies has demonstrated that the corpus contains a considerable number of original records, lying behind layers of later editing and interpolation (Davies 1979; Charles-Edwards 2013: 267). Thus, she argued that whilst there is no reliable evidence that Llandaff was a major ecclesiastical centre prior to the eleventh century, many of the charters were

derived from genuine records that were originally compiled at, and related to, other early medieval monastic houses in south-east Wales.

The content of Charter 146 is considered in greater detail elsewhere (Seaman forthcoming a). Suffice to say, it contains a high proportion of interpolated twelfth-century formulae and its witness list must have been appropriated from another charter. However, when reduced to its core elements it is possible to reconstruct a record of a donation by King Awst, and his sons, of an estate at *Lann Cors*. *Lann Cors* can be confidently identified as Llan-gors (NGR: SO134276, see Figure 1) (Coe 2001: 519–20), and although the grant itself cannot be dated, Awst and his sons can be attributed orbits in the early to mid-eighth century (Davies 1979, 76; Sims-Williams 1993, 61, note 144). The boundary clauses attached to the Llandaff charters were generally not integral to the charter texts, and many are unlikely to have formed part of the original record (Davies 1979: 143). Nevertheless, Jonathon Coe’s detailed analysis of their orthography has demonstrated that many of the clauses are genuine records that predate the redaction of the *Book of Llandaff* (Coe 2004), and many can be traced on the ground with a high degree of accuracy. Coe assigned the boundary clause appended to Charter 146 to his Group IV, c. 1010–1030 (Coe 2004). It should not be surprising that this date is after the likely orbit of Awst and his sons, since boundary clauses and the body of memory they preserved were contested ‘living’ documents, whose biographies could extend beyond their original redaction (Geary 1999: 183).

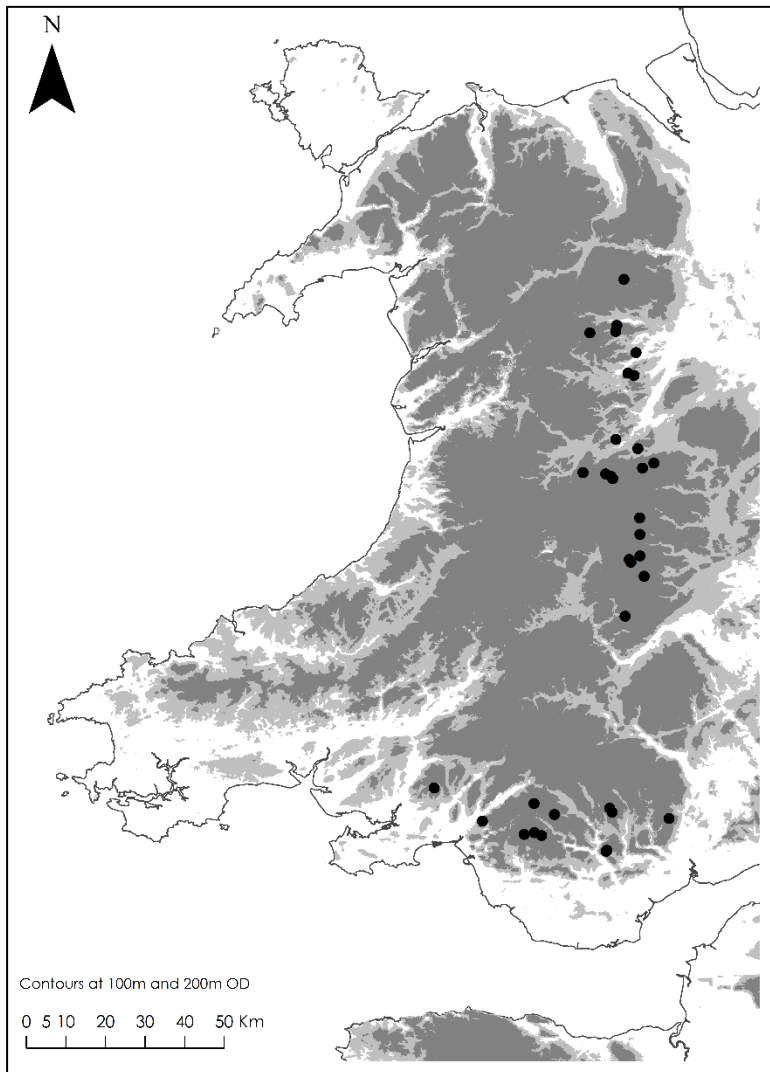


[Figure 1: The kingdom of Brycheiniog and the early medieval estate at Llan-gors.]

Dykes in early medieval Wales

Despite being inconspicuous in the archaeological literature, dykes must have been common features in the landscapes of early medieval Wales; such as the clusters of ‘short dykes’ in central Powys and the upland fringe of Glamorgan (see Figure 2). Around 30 of these have been positively identified, and many more are likely to either await discovery or are monuments in need of reclassification. These dykes form a heterogeneous classification of monuments, however, they are predominantly located in upland contexts occupying a range of topographic positions (Lewis 2006; RCAHMW 1976; Silvester and Hankinson 2002). Some are classified as ‘cross-ridge dykes’, usually with entrance gaps for trackways, whereas others cross valleys, cut across interfluvial spurs, or even

cross more varied terrain. They usually consist of a single bank with or without a ditch, although bi- and multi-vallate examples are known. The banks are generally up to c. 7m wide and survive up to c. 1.5m in height, although some may have been topped with hedges or palisades. They can be up to 3km in length although most are shorter, and many are less than 100m. The Glamorgan group of dykes are poorly dated but are generally assumed to date to the early medieval period (Crampton 1966; RCAHMW 1976; Lewis 2006: 8). Indeed, a Cadw funded programme of survey and excavation on the short dykes on Powys, produced radiocarbon dates on short-life samples from buried soils that provide consistent early medieval *termini post quem* for five dykes focusing on the sixth to eighth centuries AD (Hankinson and Caseledine 2007: Table 1, 266–68). However, not all short dykes can be assumed to be early medieval constructions. The Senghenydd Dyke in Glamorgan, for example, has been identified as a later medieval deer park boundary (Lewis 2006: 58). Others may also have their origins in the prehistoric periods. Two radiocarbon dates from a buried soil below the Devil’s Mouth Cross-Ridge Dyke on the eastern side of Long Mynd in Shropshire, provide a Middle Bronze Age *terminus post quem* (Watson 2002: 5, 16) and is one of a number of Shropshire short dykes that are thought to be Bronze Age or early Iron Age constructions. Nevertheless, as we will see in the relation to Llywarch’s dyke, we should not overlook the enduring importance of such ‘ancient monuments’ for early medieval communities (see also Maldonado 2015).



[Figure 2: Short Dykes in Wales. This map is unlikely to be representative of the total distribution of these monuments. Data from: Silvester and Hankinson (2002) and Lewis (2006).]

The Welsh short dykes were initially interpreted as defensive boundary markers, and Sir Cyril Fox saw the Powysian examples as ‘evidence of the long-continued warfare between the agricultural Mercians and their ‘troublesome’ neighbours the Welsh highlanders’ (Fox 1955: 164). However, this may not be accurate because the short dykes, as described above, have a complex and mixed provenance and appear to have been constructed by both British and Anglo-Saxon groups as well as earlier inhabitants of the landscape to serve a range of functions. Most of the cross-ridge dykes in Glamorgan, for example, are adjacent to ridgeway tracks, some of which are associated with early medieval inscribed stones (RCAHMW 1976: Figure 1). The majority of these dykes ‘face’ Brycheiniog to the north, but whilst some could have served a defensive function, they would have been better suited to controlling movement along droveways and transhumance tracks. In Powys, Hankinson and Caseledine (2007: 269) have noted a broad correspondence between some short dykes and the later *cantref* boundaries, suggesting that these were constructed as non-defensive territorial markers.

It should be expected for dykes to have also been common in lowland contexts and that the upland focus of many reflects survival biases. Indeed, features described as a *claud* (modern Welsh *clawdd* ‘dyke’ or ‘ditch’) appear as boundary markers in at least 22 (19%) of the 118 early medieval charter boundary clauses in the *Book of Llandaff*. Additionally, 39 (33%) of the clauses, record features described as *foss/fossa* (Latin, ‘ditch’). Thus, it is somewhat surprising that monuments akin the upland short-dykes have not been recognised in lowland contexts, either as upstanding monuments or as features recorded through developer funded excavations. This must be due in part to both the comparative intensity of post-medieval agricultural improvement in lowland areas, and the difficulty of dating features belonging to aceramic periods. Nevertheless, we should also note that, within the context of the clauses, the terms *claud/foss* appear not to have referred to substantial monuments, although in one instance there is a reference to a ‘great ditch’ (*foss maur*) (Charter 240viii, Coe 2001: 1016-7). Indeed, some appear to have been drainage ditches or channels (e.g. Charter 218, Coe 2001: 701). Moreover, since many of the Llandaff estates were defined by the extent of the cultivated ‘sharelands’, it can be argued that some boundary dykes represent what are later described as *pen-cloddiau* (‘head-dykes’) (Seaman forthcoming B). These were agricultural boundaries, also known as ‘corn ditches’, which separated permanently cultivated arable land (‘infield’) from the unenclosed pasture (‘outfield’) that was brought into cultivation more sporadically. These dykes were a feature of ‘infield–outfield’ farming systems across medieval Britain (Aston 1986: 127–30; Fleming and Ralph 1982: 105–6; Whittington 1973: 535). Where these survive, they can be identified on the ground comparatively easily, but their courses have often migrated over time and, again, they are notoriously difficult to date (Austin 2016: 11). Many *pen-clawdd* must have been destroyed during the post-medieval period as arable expanded and common pastures were enclosed, but some are no doubt hiding in plain sight as part of present-day field systems.

Llywarch Hen’s Dyke

In most of the boundary clauses in the *Book of Llandaff claud/foss* are used as common nouns for ditch/dyke features, but there are four instances where *claud* is compounded with a personal name to form a proper noun (Charters 123, 146, 155, 160). One of these, the *Claud Lyuarch hen* of Charter 146, stands out because of its direct allusion to Llywarch Hen, a pseudohistorical figure known independently of the place-name (Sims-Williams 1993: 51–54). The implications of this will be considered below, but first it is necessary to try and identify the dyke on the ground, before developing an understanding of the context of Llan-gors within the socio-political landscape of early medieval Wales.

Llywarch Hen’s dyke is not recorded on any surviving maps of the Llan-gors area, so in order to locate the monument, the boundary clause of Charter 146 itself must be first examined. Fortunately, this is quite detailed, and a number of features can be identified with some confidence. A translation can be given as follows (features **emphasised** can be identified on the ground):

*From the mouth of the Spring of the Twelve Saints in **Llangorse Lake** upwards along the brook as far as the spring-head, to the end of Llywarch Hen's dyke. Along the dyke until it falls into the **river Llynfi**. Along it downwards as far as the end of Brynn Eital. Leftwards across to the end of the hill, to the source of the **Nant Tawel**. Along the stream as far as the **Llynfi**. Along the **Llynfi** as far as the **lake**. Along the lake as far as the mouth of the Spring of the Twelve Saints where it began (Coe 2001: 975-6).*

This passage reveals that the dyke lies above Llangorse Lake, between the Spring of the Twelve Saints and the River Llynfi. The location of the spring, which is clearly a holy spring, is not recorded, but based on the direction of the perambulation and the rivers that are named it certainly rose and flowed into Llangorse Lake from the east (Seaman in press). Several brooks flow into Llangorse Lake from springs in this direction, but as discussed in another article, there is evidence to suggest that those identified on Figure 1 are the most likely candidates (Seaman in press). They all rise in the open pasture of Mynydd Llangorse, but are located just above the medieval parish boundary, which in this area follows a prominent *pen-clawdd* represented by substantial hollow-way and field-bank topped by a hedge that runs along the upper limit of the post-medieval enclosure (see Figures 3 and 4). The survival of this feature is intermittent, but its course can be followed for around 4km (depending upon which spring is identified as the holy spring). If this is the dyke then it must depart from the parish boundary if it is to 'fall into the Llynfi', and it is possible to trace a route that follows a lane and hollow-way through lower lying ground (see Figure 1). In this regard, it is relevant to note that *pen-clawdd* were often converted into lanes at points where they separated what were open fields from areas of shared pasture that have since been enclosed (Comeau 2012: 37; Fleming and Ralph 1982: 115). Thus, it is possible to identify a substantial *pen-clawdd* on the correct side of the Llangorse Lake, close to the likely location of the Spring of the Twelve Saints, which in large part follows the later parish boundary, and broadly matches the description given in the early medieval boundary clause. It is therefore suggested that this feature can be identified as Llywarch Hen's dyke. A potential problem with this interpretation is that the *pen-clawdd* circumnavigates the uplands of the Mynydd Troed, Mynydd Llangorse, and Cefn Moel to the south, and so it does not have a natural terminus. Nevertheless, the survival of the *pen-clawdd* is intermittent and trackways do cross its course close to all of the possible locations of the Spring of the Twelve Saints, so it could very well be that one of these was identified as a terminus when the bounds were written.



[Figure 3: Section of Llywarch Hen's Dyke, looking north. The open pastures of Mynydd Llangorse are to the right (©Peter Seaman).]



[Figure 4: Llywarch Hen's dyke (topped with trees) running from left to right, with Llangorse Lake in the background. The second of the three springs marked on Figure 1, rises in the foreground and flows down towards the lake (©Peter Seaman).]



[Figure 5: The *pen-clawdd* demarcating the edge of the open pasture as seen from the south west side of the Llangorse Lake (©Peter Seaman).]

In the absence of any information from excavations it is very difficult to determine the date at which the dyke was constructed, but the system of infield-outfield agriculture to which it belonged is likely to have predated the early medieval period (*cf.* Cunliffe 2009: 57, 60). Indeed, its origins may lie in the early Roman period, when a record of sedimentation observed in a core taken from Llangorse Lake suggests there was an increase in woodland clearance and arable activity, indicating a related reorganization of farming systems at this time (Chambers 1999: 354–55; Jones *et al.* 1985: 229, 234).

In determining the location and identity of the Llywarch Hen's dyke, it is necessary to consider political history of Brycheiniog and the place of Llan-gors within the kingdom, since these are both relevant to the dyke's interpretation.

Llan-gors: a royal and ecclesiastical centre in Brycheiniog

The Llandaff charters suggest that kings had been active within Brycheiniog since the early eighth century, but it is not known if they were rulers of Brycheiniog or some other region at this time (Davies 1978: 18–20). The first reliable reference to kings of Brycheiniog is in the late ninth century *Life of Alfred the Great* where Asser recounts that 'Elise ap Tewdwr, king of Brycheiniog, being driven by the might of the same sons of Rhodri, sought of his own accord the lordship of King Alfred' (Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 96). Given that Asser's account suggests Elise ap Tewdwr's kingdom was under pressure from Gwynedd at the time he was writing, it is interesting to note that the Welsh annals record conflict between 'the men of Brycheiniog' and kingdom of Gwent in 848, whilst somewhat later the B and C texts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* record a Mercian raid on Brycheiniog in 916, in which the king's wife and thirty-three others was captured (Morris 1980: 48; Swanton 2000: 100).

The Mercian raid was focused on Llangorse Lake (described as *Brecenan mere* 'Brecon Mere'). The lake lies at the centre of a network of early routeways (Camden 1587, 357), and appears to have been the focus of a 'central zone' within Brycheiniog since at least the early eighth century. Kings are associated with the Llan-gors area in Llandaff Charters 146, 167, and 237b (Seaman forthcoming a), and Alan Lane and Mark Redknap who conducted excavations on the unique ninth- to tenth-century crannog within Llangorse Lake, interpret the site as a royal residence and estate centre (see Figure 1). Indeed, they link the crannog's destruction and abandonment with the Mercian raid (Lane and Redknap in press). This central zone probably consisted of the later parishes of Llan-gors, Llanfihangel Tal-y-llyn (the subject of grants in Charters 167 and 237b), Cathedine, and Llangasty Talyllyn, all of which focus upon early churches. Llangasty Talyllyn is also associated with the eponymous royal dynasty of Brycheiniog in the *De Situ Brecheniauc and Cognacio Brychan*, two pseudohistorical texts which appear to have been created within early medieval Brycheiniog (Thomas 1994: 137-43). Also relevant to the royal status of Llan-gors and the mythology associated with its landscape are stories about Llangorse Lake recounted in the late twelve century by Gerald of

Wales and Walter Map. In his *Journey Though Wales* Gerald describes how Gruffudd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr (d. 1137) declared and demonstrated that if the rightful prince of Wales commanded the birds of Llangorse Lake to sing, they would do so (Thorpe 1978: 93–95). Meanwhile, Map's *De Nugis Curialium* includes an early version of the 'Fairy Bride Legend', in which Brychan (the eponymous ruler of Brycheiniog) married a woman who emerged from Llangorse Lake (Wood 1992: 57). These stories are significant as they attest to an association between the landscape of Llan-gors and mythology related to kingship.

At some point after the Mercian raid, Llan-gors came into the possession of the Church. The evidence for this comes from the narration of Charter 237b (c. 929-944), which details how a dispute between a local king and bishop over food rents from the estate was resolved at the monastery at Llan-gors (Seaman forthcoming A). This monastery is likely to have been located at what is now the site of the parish church of St Paulinus, where three fragments of stone sculpture dating to between the ninth and twelfth centuries also attest to the significance of the site in the pre-Norman period (Redknap and Lewis 2007: 560–61). We know little about the estate after the mid-tenth century, but it may have been held by St David's before it was granted to Brecon Priory in the early twelfth century (Cowley 1977: 175). Brycheiniog ceased to exist as an independent kingdom sometime in the mid- to late tenth century, when it was subsumed into one of its neighbouring kingdoms (Davies 1982: 108).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that, during the ninth and tenth centuries at least, Brycheiniog was a 'frontier' kingdom with aggressors to the north, south, and east, and that Llan-gors was a centre of royal, and latterly ecclesiastical authority, which witnessed conflict and incursion on at least one occasion.

Place-stories in the early medieval landscape

Llywarch Hen was purportedly a sixth-century ruler in the 'Old North' (Williams 1935), but it was not the historical Llywarch whose name was invoked in the *Claud Lyuarch hen*. In early medieval Wales, Llywarch Hen was known primarily through a substantial body of poetry composed well after the historical figure's death (Rowland 1990). Llywarch is not the only figure from the Old North who was transplanted into the early medieval Welsh landscape through oral literary tradition. Others, such as Owain ab Urien and Cynon ap Clydno Eidyn, are localised in a Welsh geographical context in the *Englynion y Beddau* (The Stanzas of the Graves) (Petts 2007: 164). Similarly, elsewhere in the *Book of Llandaff*, a place-name in Charter 206, *Messur Prituenn*, alludes to the story of *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Coe 2001: 597–98). It is not surprising that the name of a dyke should reference a figure from oral tradition, since there was a strong association between place and narrative in the early medieval world (Mac Cana 1988). The clearest articulation of this phenomenon is found in the *dindshenchas* collections of early Irish prose and poetry that recount place-names and the mythological narratives attached to them (Gwynn 1991), but numerous instances are encountered in medieval Welsh literature; such as in the *Mabinogi* and the *De Situ Brecheniauc* (Bollard 2009; Petts 2007; Siewers 2005). What we see here is a reflection of the importance attributed to places, their names, and the onomastic tales that preserved and perpetuated them in the ordering of landscape by societies with few written records and no maps. In pre-literate societies, place-names survived through oral tradition, and as 'place-stories' became fixed in the landscape. In this fashion, the oral tradition came to construct the identity of that place, and vice-versa. This process helped to establish a 'sense of place' for people within their landscapes (Gardiner 2012: 21; Tilley 1994: 18). Moreover, anthropological studies have demonstrated how place-stories rooted in the fabric of the landscape accrued ideological significance and had the power to perpetuate tradition and engender particular understandings of the world through the establishment of social norms (Basso 1996: 77–104; cf. Johnson 2007: 148–49). Thus, John Bollard (2009) has examined how place-names and the landscape were 'central characters' in the *Mabinogi*, which served as reminders both of the cultural

significance of the tales and of the importance of the themes they explore (see also Siewers (2005: 197) who sees the *Mabinogi* as a 'dynamic dialogue of Otherworld and topography'). Similarly, Alex Woolf (2008) has argued that the moral of a story in the *Historia Brittonum* where the citadel of the unjust and tyrannical King Benllie is destroyed through divine providence was referenced in the landscape through the juxtaposition of Moel Fenlli ('Bare hill of Benllie' an Iron Age hillfort) and Llanarmon Yn Ial (an commotal centre of Powys). Particularly relevant to the present study is David Petts's analysis of the ninth- or tenth-century poems recorded in the *Englynion y Beddau* (The Stanzas of the Graves) (Petts 2007). Petts argues that the three-line verses of the poem served to 'connect the contemporary landscape to a perceived, mythical past' through the localization of the burial places of mythological individuals within the Welsh landscape. Indeed, some of the burial locations can be identified with prehistoric monuments, whose original construction, like that of Llywarch's dyke at Llan-gors, was lost to time (Petts 2007: 164-5). Importantly, Petts argues that this mythologization of the landscape should be seen within the socio-political context of the time in which the stanzas were written. Noting that alongside the pressure being exerted on the Welsh by the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms during the ninth and tenth centuries, 'the poem transforms the landscape of Wales with its landmarks, both natural and prehistoric, into a landscape of resistance to Saxon and Danish incursions' (Petts 2007: 165).

The affective nature of place-stories reflected in early medieval oral and literary tradition was particularly important in the definition of boundaries. In a world without maps, territorial boundaries, particularly those that were contested, had to be inscribed upon the physical landscape through the cultural memory of its inhabitants (Gardiner 2012: 21-22). The boundaries of estates were reinforced through their perambulation and the performance of rituals and recounting of stories, in front of witnesses, at particular points along the processual route (Howe 2008: 37-39). When these 'oral performances' of property rights and transactions were written down as charters the central importance of names and places was such that 'the vernacular had to bleed through the Latin text' (Geary 1999: 176). It is for this reason that whilst the text of early medieval charters was usually written in Latin, the boundary clauses were more often in the vernacular, so that when they were performed aloud the place-stories they referenced could be understood by lay audiences (Geary 1999: 177-81; Kelly 1990: 56-57). The names of boundary features and the oral traditions associated with them formed the 'mnemonic pegs' that gave structure to this process of memorisation. For the most part the onomastic tales associated with early medieval boundary features do not survive, but since Llywarch Hen's dyke was associated with a body of oral tradition, some of which was later written down, it provides an opportunity to explore the confluence of a place, name, and narrative.

Llywarch Hen's Lament: poetry in a contested landscape

The Llywarch Hen poems survive in documents of the thirteenth century and later, but the material or at least some of it, is thought to have been composed in the eighth or ninth century (Rowland 1990: 388-89; for a translation see Kock 2003: 385-404). Several places in Brycheiniog can be identified in the poetry, and Patrick Sims-Williams (1993) has argued that it was composed at Llan-gors. In this regard, it may be significant that the Llan-gors dyke is one of number of features associated with Llywarch within Brycheiniog, others include the Llyn (lake), Nant (stream), Bedd (grave – which appears to be a reference to a prehistoric standing stone), and Waun (moor) of Llywarch (Llywelyn 2018: 20; 77, 88, 112). Two sets of verses can be distinguished within the poetry, both of which are narrated from the perspective of Llywarch Hen. The first takes the form of a dialogue between Llywarch and Gwen, his last surviving son, in which Llywarch goads Gwen into unwise, and ultimately fatal, battle. The second set forms a lament, in which the aging Llywarch bemoans his foolish actions and fading abilities as a warrior. The narrative context of the verses would have been known to its original audience but is lost in a modern context. It is therefore difficult to interpret the meaning of the poetry and the oral traditions they arose out of, but we can be sure that this was not praise poetry;

Llywarch's story is about the violation of social norms, and the verses comes across as a warning rather than exemplar (Charles-Edwards 2013: 668–74; Rowland 2014: xviii-xxii). Indeed, the themes recounted in the poetry, such as inter-British feuding, battles against the Anglo-Saxons, and the defence of borders, resonant with the Llan-gors, its likely place of composition. Since during the late ninth and early tenth centuries Llan-gors was a royal estate in a frontier kingdom threatened by Gwynedd and Gwent and raided by the Mercians at least once. Whilst the moral of Llywarch's tale is difficult to reconstruct, it is noteworthy that a central verse of the surviving poetry refers to Gwen's (the last surviving son of Llywarch Hen) last stand against the Anglo-Saxons at the 'Battle of the Green Dyke' (¶167). Perhaps, therefore, it was this story that was alluded to through Llywarch's dyke. In this regard it may not be coincidence that Llywarch Hen's dyke defined the eastern and northern sides of the estate at Llan-gors, which is the direction from which an English attack would have come in 916 (Sims-Williams 1993: 53).

It can be confidently assumed that antecedents of the surviving Llywarch Hen poetry were recounted at Llan-gors, perhaps within a hall on the crannog or during open air festivals when the freemen of the region gathered 'to sing songs, recite their pedigrees, hear tales of the heroism of their ancestors' (Davies 1987: 80). Onomastic tales associated with Llywarch Hen were no doubt also performed at the dyke during the perambulation of the estate's bounds and as people and animals crossed the dyke during seasonal patterns of movement. By narrating Llywarch's story through the landscape and rooting it in the concrete details of the dyke, an ancient feature that formed the backbone of the agriculture landscape, the tales and the dyke acquired mythic value and historic relevance (Bollard 2009: 40; Tilley 1994: 33). Thus, it can be suggested that the dyke and Llywarch's lament that was told through it served as a didactic that enforced knowledge of the physical extent of the estate, but also the status and perhaps the obligations and responsibilities of the royal dynasty who held it. The dyke was not then an overtly defensive 'military' earthwork, and it was certainly not built by Llywarch Hen, neither was it simply an agricultural boundary and a convenient feature with which to construct a boundary clause; but as a narrative site of battle, it was a mnemonic peg that both physically and metaphorically defined a centre of power and authority.

Llywarch Hen's dyke should, therefore, be set alongside the body folklore focused on Llan-gors that was later recounted by Gerald of Wales and Walter Map. It is unknown why the association with Llywarch Hen arose within Brycheiniog at this time. Llywarch does not appear in the genealogy of the royal dynasty and was not an ancestral figure, but if Llywarch's role within the poetry was to demonstrate the folly of unwise leadership it may be significant that he was claimed as an ancestor by the kings of Gwynedd who, as demonstrated, were pressuring Brycheiniog at the time of its composition (Maund 2006: 48).

Saints and sinners: Christianizing boundaries

As demonstrated above, the boundary clause of Charter 146 records that Llywarch Hen's dyke was adjacent to a feature described as the 'Spring of the Twelve Saints' ('Finnaun y Dodec Seint'). This holy spring was most likely dedicated to the Twelve Apostles, whose cult was propagated in South Wales during the tenth and eleventh centuries (Seaman in press). The spring and its waters may have offered spiritual protection to animals and people as they travelled into and out of the estate. It was no doubt also associated with a body of oral tradition that operated in a similar way to the Llywarch Hen poetry. However, there may be more to the juxtaposition of the spring and dyke than first appears. Explicitly Christian features are generally rare in early medieval boundary clauses, and John Blair (2005: 488) has argued that 'boundary perambulation was still, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, essentially a secular activity which had not yet assimilated into liturgical ritual'. Thus, it is likely that the Spring of the Twelve Saints, or at least the spring's Christian associations, was a comparatively late addition to an earlier boundary clause. This may be significant, since the estate came into the possession of the Church sometime after the Mercian raid of 916 at broadly

same the time the cult of the Twelve Apostles were being propagated in the region (Seaman in press). The secular themes of Llywarch story would no doubt have been unpalatable to the Church, but since they were part of how the estate was inscribed in cultural memory they could not be easily erased or forgotten. Therefore, we may suggest, speculatively, that the juxtaposition of spring and dyke could represent a comparatively late attempt to Christianize the bounds of the estate and the stories associated with them.

Conclusions

Dykes and ditches must have been common features within both the upland and lowland landscapes of early medieval Wales, but they have scarcely attracted the scholarly attention they deserve. Indeed, it is very likely that many early medieval (and earlier) *pen-clawdd* lie unnoticed within the countryside of Wales today. The evidence suggests that a range of dyke types were to be found in the early medieval landscape, and targeted research, including survey and excavation is needed to understand their different functions. Hopefully, however, this paper demonstrates how a multidisciplinary approach can help to also understand something of how dykes were engaged with as 'places' operating as mnemonic pegs in the early medieval landscape.

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