

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Chester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Archaeology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Medieval Monuments in the Marches: Transforming Policy, Practices & Perceptions		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2006 – ongoing		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Howard Williams	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2008 – ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2010 – ongoing		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

The research has fostered and transformed heritage policy and practice for, as well as public perceptions of and engagement with, the distinctive medieval monuments in the Welsh Marches. Drawing on ground-breaking interdisciplinary research, activities focused on: (i) supporting Llangollen Museum and Cadw in researching, managing, conserving and interpreting the Pillar of Eliseg (<https://projecteliseg.wordpress.com/>); (ii) researching and interpreting the rediscovered ‘Smiling Abbot’ funerary monument; (iii) establishing and developing the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory to promote and foster new research and public engagements with Wat’s Dyke and Offa’s Dyke (<https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/>); (iv) challenging popular misconceptions of these borderland monuments in the context of resurgent nationalist politics and the divergent COVID-19 pandemic lockdown strategies for England and Wales.

**2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

**Williams** has forged a new interpretative approach to exploring the long-term relationships between medieval monuments, memory and identity from the Early Middle Ages to the present day and evaluated archaeology’s role in the production of social memory in the contemporary world. For the Welsh Marches this is manifest through exploring the significance, biography and landscape context of the Pillar of Eliseg and its public archaeology through Project Eliseg (2010–present) and the ERC-funded Past in its Place project (2012–2016) [R1]. This expertise has been extended to the interpretation and public archaeology of a re-discovered fragment of 14<sup>th</sup>-century abbatial funerary monument associated with Valle Crucis Abbey (Denbighshire) in collaboration with Llangollen Museum: the ‘Smiling Abbot’ [R2] and researching both the past significance, life-histories, landscape contexts and public archaeology of the linear earthworks of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands: Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke [R1, R3–R6]. These strands share in shedding light upon, and rethinking, relationships between people to place through monuments and memories in the Welsh Marches of significance to residents and visitors today, as well as broader national and international discourses on frontiers and borderlands as spaces of creative and transformative contestation and community over the long term [R5, R6].

Disseminated via academic publications, the creation of a new diamond open-access journal (*Offa’s Dyke Journal*), academic blogs (*Archaeodeath*, *Project Eliseg* and the *Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory*), public talks, social media and the media, this research has consistently and cumulatively challenged both academic and public misunderstandings of the medieval monuments, their significance, biographies and landscapes in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands focusing on the Pillar of Eliseg, Wat’s Dyke and Offa’s Dyke. Integral to this research has been **Williams’** critical evaluation of digital public archaeology for the medieval monuments of the Welsh Marches as well as the real-world public engagement and heritage conservation, management and interpretation of the monuments and their landscapes [R3–R6].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

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- [R1] Murrieta-Flores, P. and **Williams, H.** 2017. Placing the Pillar of Eliseg: movement, visibility and memory in the early medieval landscape, 61(1), 69–103. Winner of the Martyn Jope Award, Society for Medieval Archaeology. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00766097.2017.1295926>
- [R2] **Williams, H.**, Smith, G., Crane, D. and Watson, A. 2018. The Smiling Abbot: rediscovering a unique medieval effigial slab, 175(2): 255–91. DOI: 10.1080/00665983.2017.1366705 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.2017.1366705>
- [R3] **Williams, H.** and Delaney, L. 2019. The Offa's Dyke Collaboratory and the Offa's Dyke Journal. *Offa's Dyke Journal* 1: 1–31. <http://revistas.jasarqueologia.es/index.php/odjournal/article/view/248>
- [R4] **Williams, H.** and Evans, S. 2020. Death and memory in fragments: Project Eliseg's public archaeology, in H. Williams and P. Clarke (eds) *Digging into the Dark Ages: Early Medieval Public Archaeologies*, Oxford: Archaeopress, pp. 172–192. <https://www.archaeopress.com/ArchaeopressShop/Public/displayProductDetail.asp?id=%7BDE9A5B19-7AAD-4FA7-A097-060E0525533D%7D>
- [R5] **Williams, H.** 2020. Collaboratory, coronavirus and the colonial countryside. *Offa's Dyke Journal* 2: 1–28. <http://revistas.jasarqueologia.es/index.php/odjournal/article/view/283>
- [R6] Gleave, K., **Williams, H.** and Clarke, P. (eds) 2020. *Public Archaeologies of Frontiers and Borderlands*. Oxford: Archaeopress. <https://www.archaeopress.com/ArchaeopressShop/Public/displayProductDetail.asp?id={728A30BF-8B57-4817-8398-9A1B5CD4F82A}>

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

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Together with co-convenors from a range of stakeholder organisations on either side of the current Welsh-English border (Llangollen Museum, Cardiff University, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, the Offa's Dyke Association, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership), and initiating dialogues and debates far wider and affecting work by Cadw, Historic England and The National Trust for Wales, **Williams** has facilitated and directed enhanced awareness, implemented resources, and shifted attitudes towards medieval monuments beyond academia in the heritage sector, local people and wider publics.

This has been achieved through establishing the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory (2017-present, now 54 members), digital and real-world public engagement and research networking, thus successfully establishing a new era fostering community, professional and academic collaboration in researching, managing, conserving and interpreting the internationally renowned early medieval monuments of the region - Pillar of Eliseg, Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke - as well as the later medieval semi-effigial grave-slab likely from Valle Crucis Abbey), as well as their landscape contexts. Together, the activities have rehabilitated these monuments and their landscape contexts in the public consciousness through media, social media and public events and affecting decisions regarding their management and heritage interpretation, considering them in terms of local, national and international scales relating to the study of frontiers and borderlands past and present.

These initiatives were impeded and delayed but also effectively transformed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the UK from March 2020.

To date, the principal changes in policy, practice and perception serving as evidence of impact have been:

- The results of 2010–2012 Project Eliseg fieldwork have been widely disseminated online and directly informed Cadw's revised heritage interpretation of the Pillar of Eliseg and its landscape context through new signs both at the Pillar of Eliseg and Valle Crucis Abbey, established in spring 2017 incorporating Williams's principal interpretations of the monument and its landscape context [**S1**; **R1**] as well as new displays and interpretations of the Pillar of Eliseg in Llangollen Museum [**S2**; **R4**] and by Cadw at Caernarfon Castle [**S1**; **R4**].

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- Analysing and publishing new interpretations of the rediscovered ‘Smiling Abbot’ early 14<sup>th</sup>-century grave-slab, thus directly informing its heritage interpretation at Llangollen Museum and securing increased visitor numbers [S2] as well as global exposure via the Archaeodeath blog [S3] and publication in a prominent international academic journal [R2].
- Enhancing awareness and engagement with medieval monuments via the establishment of the *Archaeopress* Wordpress blog which has become a key medium for public digital engagement about the archaeology and heritage of death & memory through 1,568 blog-posts since 2013, many related to the Welsh Marches including 59 re: Project Eliseg, 81 re: Offa’s Dyke, 47 re: Wat’s Dyke and 376 about medieval monuments all disseminated across social media platforms. In the context of the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory, the website has involved a prolific set of blog-posts (154 blog-posts since 2017) [S3–S4, S6–S8];
- Developing public knowledge and education in the Welsh Marches’ medieval monuments through the instigation of the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory (54 members at present) and the creation, design and establishment (part-funded by the Offa’s Dyke Association and the University of Chester) of a brand-new diamond open-access academic journal – *Offa’s Dyke Journal* [R3, R5]. Two *ODJ* volumes are now published, disseminated freely online and through hard-copies distributed by *Archaeopress* publishing. The journal makes reliable and relevant original research and resources freely available to scholars and local communities to combat pseudohistory and pseudoarchaeology; it has been specifically utilised in public talks and for community groups [S5, S7];
- Successfully lobbying for a shift in the charitable aims of the Offa’s Dyke Association to encapsulate Wat’s Dyke as well as Offa’s Dyke and paying closer attention to the conservation and management of their landscape contexts [S6] and raising awareness regarding the borderlands as a story of contestation and colonization [S7];
- Raising awareness, supporting and guiding heritage bodies regarding the conservation, management and interpretation of Offa’s Dyke including lobbying for changing heritage interpretation of Offa’s Dyke at NT Chirk and Wat’s Dyke at NT Erddig, plus the reception and implementation of the Offa’s Dyke Conservation Management Plan commissioned by the Offa’s Dyke Association, Historic England and Cadw, published in 2019. This establishes a new era for the future conservation, management and interpretation of Offa’s Dyke informed and sustained by the latest academic research via the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory linked to strategies of countryside ‘decolonization’ [S6, S7, R5];
- Delivering community action through expert guidance by **Williams** and other Collaboratory co-convenors, thus steering of local community groups in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Powys, Shropshire and Flintshire resulting in preliminary new identifications of ‘lost’ sections of Offa’s Dyke and establishing momentum for future sustainable and best-practice community engagement [S6–S8].
- **Williams** lead-organised a series of inter-linked public-facing events across the Welsh Marches organised by the Offa’s Dyke Collaboratory since 2017; together with a host of public conferences and talks by co-convenors of the Collaboratory, and addressing related Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke, and other medieval monuments in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands. These including a public conference culminating in an open-access publication [R6] and the 4 April 2020 ‘Special Offa: Communities and Offa’s Dyke’ day conference, initially fully booked for Trefonen Village Hall (Shropshire) but transferred online as a virtual tour and series of YouTube presentations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown [S7–S9, see also S3].
- An enhanced awareness among the British public regarding the Anglo-Welsh borderlands achieved through a series of public talks and events [S9] and two high-profile media appearances featuring **Williams** discussing Offa’s Dyke [S10].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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- [S1] *Project Eliseg* website (<https://projecteliseg.wordpress.com/>) including blog-posts and links to the excavation reports of the 2010–2012 fieldwork and other publications associated within the project including R1 and R4 (**user statistics available as a pdf**)
- [S2] Testimonials from the former-Manager and Advisor to Llangollen Museum, and the Manager of Llangollen Museum, demonstrating work on Project Eliseg and the ‘Smiling

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Abbot' grave-slab fragment and broader digital engagement with the archaeology and heritage of the Vale of Llangollen (**available as a pdf**)

- [S3] *Archaeodeath* website blog-posts on the Smiling Abbot funerary monument (<https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/?s=smiling+abbot>); Offa's Dyke (<https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/category/early-medieval-archaeology/dykes-early-medieval-archaeology/offas-dyke/> and Wat's Dyke (<https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/category/early-medieval-archaeology/dykes-early-medieval-archaeology/wats-dyke/>) including field visits and blog-posts on the archaeology and heritage of death and memory in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands (**user statistics available as a pdf**)
- [S4] *The Offa's Dyke Collaboratory* website including public-facing events (<https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/odc-events/>) and blog-posts: (<https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/>) (**user statistics available as a pdf**)
- [S5] The *Offa's Dyke Journal* digital platform and content set up in collaboration with academic publisher JAS Arqueologia (<http://www.jasarqueologia.es/>) and funded by the Offa's Dyke Association and the University of Chester (**review of Offa's Dyke Journal volume 1 for 2019 available as a pdf**)
- [S6] Testimonials from Offa's Dyke Collaboratory co-convenors from Cardiff University, and the chairman of the Offa's Dyke Association, demonstrating the character and extent of the impact of **Williams** as part of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory, including organising events, supporting and shifting policy and offering direct input into the ODA's activities and approaches to conserving, managing and interpreting linear monuments (**available as a pdf**)
- [S7] Testimonials by heritage professionals from the National Trust for Wales; an archaeologist and artist; a National Trail Path Officer (Offa's Dyke Path); and the Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England, demonstrating Project Eliseg's and the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory's contributions to the heritage management, conservation, interpretation and public engagement in the Welsh Marches (**available as a pdf**)
- [S8] Testimonials from local groups supported by the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory actively researching Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke and the Anglo-Welsh borderlands: S8a: an individual for 'Offa's Dyke North'; S8b: an individual for Caer Alyn; S8c an individual for the Trefonen Rural Protection Group, S8d: two individuals on their work with COSMM and the Offa's Dyke Association and Offa's Dyke Centre, S8e an individual identifying the Collaboratory's support for the Tidenham Historical Society, S8f and the President of the Chester Archaeological Society (**available as a pdf**).
- [S9] Public and society talks delivered:
1. 'What's Wat's Dyke', Holt Local History Society, 26 November 2020.
  2. 'Yale and Offa; Reflecting on Statues, Naming Practices and the Heritage of the Welsh Marches', *Whose Heritage is it Anyway? Managing Changing Historical Interpretations* Historic Towns & Villages Forum Webinar, 5 November 2020
  3. 'Offa's Dyke: Britain's Greatest Monument', 4<sup>th</sup> University Archaeology Day, British Museum, 22 October 2020
  4. 'Offa's Dyke: A Watery Perspective', Chester Society for Landscape History, 28 September 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sXUFtFxcYc&t=49s>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmaBbvi2OAK&t=1636s>
  5. 'Introduction to 'Special Offa', Communities and Offa's Dyke': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xyNjhfqWCo&t=19s>
  6. 'Launching the Offa's Dyke Journal volume 2', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKUIb4Gc3hs>
  7. 'Public Archaeology and Wat's Dyke', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6NWDERl6pk>
  8. 'Digi-Dykes: Linear Earthworks Online', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m4tEG3vz4M>
  9. 'Introduction'. *Offa's Dyke Collaboratory Research and Conservation Forum*, Cardiff University, 22 Jan 2020
  10. 'What's What with Wat's Dyke', Living History Festival, Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, 13 July 2019
  11. 'Introducing Offa's Dyke', Living History Festival, Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, 13 July 2019

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12. 'Offa's Dyke and the North-West Frontier of Mercia'. Prestatyn Walking Festival Public Lecture, 18 May 2019.
13. 'Hydraulic borders? Water and Offa's Dyke'. Keynote address at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Weekend AGM of the Offa's Dyke Association, Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, Powys, 4 May 2019
14. 'The Archaeology of Death: Exploring Mortality Past and Present'. Trefonen Rural Protection Group Evening Lecture, 26 April 2019
15. Comparing the Landscapes of Offa's and Wat's Dykes. CBA Wales Conference, *New Perspectives on the Dyke*, Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, 30 March 2019
16. 'The Smiling Abbot', St Asaph Archaeological Society. 6 Feb 2019
17. 'Introducing the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory', The Offa's Dyke Conference, Marches School, Oswestry, 15 September 2018
18. 'The Smiling Abbot', Flintshire U3A, Mold, 23 July 2018
19. 'Rethinking Offa's and Wat's Dykes' Chester Heritage Festival, Grosvenor Museum, Chester, 29 June 2018
20. Tour of the Vale of Llangollen including Vale Crucis Abbey and the Pillar of Eliseg for the Chester Archaeological Society, 28 April 2018
21. 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes: Monuments, Memory and Movement', University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, 12 October 2017.
22. 'Archaeologists and the Dead'. Llangollen Museum, 25 May 2016
23. 'Boundaries before the March, Boundaries on the March: Monuments, Movement and Memory in Early Medieval Western Britain', Keynote and Public Lecture, *Contest and Collaboration: Chester Conference on the March of Wales*, 10-11 April 2015, University of Chester
24. 'The Pillar of Eliseg and Other Stories', *Exploring the Borderlands: Current Archaeology in the Marches*. Clwyd-Powys Archaeology Trust Day School, 25 October 2014
25. 'Project Eliseg' Flintshire U3A, Mold, 22 Sept, 2014.
26. 'Project Eliseg 2010-2012: Investigating the Origins of Powys.' Holt Local History Society, 23 Jan 2014.

## Public events organised:

- 'Special Offa: Communities and Offa's Dyke', Digital Events replacing day conference at short notice: <https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/special-offa-1-introducing-special-offa-communities-and-offas-dyke/> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xyNjhfqWCo&list=PLIB6PYW8nJ2FsFvXVmjYHVI0GRr1CE-Ze>) and the Trefonen Special Offa Tragical History Tour: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3ZRURrTfuo&list=PLIB6PYW8nJ2F8Ewz9TMAJ1zNWp1fAPxts>, 4 April 2020
- 'The Public Archaeology of Frontiers and Borderlands', The 4<sup>th</sup> University of Chester Archaeology Student Conference, Grosvenor Museum, 20 March 2019
- 'Offa's Dyke Heritage', Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, 23 March 2018
- 'Offa's Dyke Collaboratory Inaugural Workshop', University Centre Shrewsbury, 28 April 2017

**(Details, feedback statements from audiences and user statistics available as a pdf)**

[S10] Media coverage: (a) press information for the documentary *Beyond the Walls: In Search of the Celts* 4 December 2018 provided by Alleycats Films (**available as a pdf**) and (b) interview for BBC Travel: 'Offa's Dyke: Britain's unmarked 'no-man's land'', 21 Dec 2020, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/travel/story/20201215-offas-dyke-britains-unmarked-no-mans-land>