

Betws-yn-Rhos

SH 9063 7353
105486

Introduction

The village of Betws-yn-Rhos is situated on an east to west route, the B5381, three and a half miles south-west of Abergele. It lies too at the junction of several minor lanes.

The settlement lies in and beside the small valley of a tributary of the River Dulas. Hills rise quite steeply to the south while the land falls away more gently to the north. The church is situated in a prominent position at the crest of the valley slope on the west side of the valley. The Wheatsheaf Inn and Ty Mawr occupy similar positions nearby. Some dwellings cover the small amount of flat land on the valley floor and extend up its sides. A considerable amount of housing has been added to the extremities of the village in the modern era along each of the roads leading from the village centre.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Betws-yn-Rhos up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to look at other sources of information and particularly at the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core offers a visual interpretation of the area within which the settlement developed, based on our interpretation of the evidence currently to hand. It is not an immutable boundary line, and will require modification as new discoveries are made. The map does not show those areas or buildings that are statutorily designated, nor does it pick out those sites or features that are specifically mentioned in the text.

We have not referenced the sources that have been examined to produce this report, but that information will be available in the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

Bettws is first recorded in Pope Nicholas' Taxation in 1291. In 1530 it was *le bethows* and exactly a century later, in 1630, as *Bettus in Rhos*. But it appeared also under other aliases. A reference to *Betus wyrion gwgon* in the years between 1545 and 1553 signals a relationship with the 'descendants of Gwgon' and it is tempting to see in this perhaps an indicator of the church's original founder. And *Bettus Abergeley* in 1652 and *Bettws Abergele* as recently as 1839 reveals that Abergele was its mother church. The term *bettws/betws* is usually taken to mean that a chapel was established as an oratory, probably at a relatively late date such as the 13th century (though archaeology favours an earlier date here, for which see below). 'Rhos' was the cantref in which the church and settlement lay.

Nothing is known of the origin and early history of this settlement, and it is not even feasible at this time to suggest whether the chapel was in existence before the later 11th-century Norman Conquest. Its development during the Middle Ages has yet to be charted, although excavations in 2006 confirmed the presence of at least one medieval building near the church.

At the very end of the 17th century it was revealed in Edward Lhuyd's *Parochialia* that there were nine houses in the village. In combination, the earliest Ordnance Survey maps and the 1840 Tithe survey allow us a preliminary attempt to analyse the village plan. The church had obviously become the focus on which five roads or lanes converged. The St Asaph to Conwy road (now the B5381) east to west road swings round the churchyard. Whether it was as significant in communications term at the beginning of the 19th century as it is now is

debatable, though it has been claimed that it lay on the 18th-century coach route from Chester to Conwy. The lane down from the north-east linking Bettws with Abergele was conversely rather more important than today, given the links between these two settlements. The lane coming in from the south (from the direction of Llansannan) may also have been more significant – its longstanding existence can be inferred from the fact that further south it was adopted for parish boundaries. It now adopts a sinuous curve to meet the B5381 beside the churchyard, but it appears that prior to the 19th century it entered a larger open space in front of the churchyard which was in the 19th century infilled by a house called Llaisafon. There is no evidence that Bettws ever hosted a market, but its annual fairs could have been held in this square. Finally another lane met the B5381 by the south-western side of the churchyard, but this has now been blocked by modern development.

The heritage to 1750

St Michael's church (105460) was built in its entirety in 1838-9, a small church with a distinctive west end. Nothing of its predecessor remains except perhaps for re-used masonry and a single wall monument from the early 19th century, although the Victorian fixtures and fittings include box pews and the Royal Arms.

The churchyard (105522) was formerly sub-circular. It still has a tall curved boundary wall retaining it on its south and west sides, at the foot of which lies the main road through the village. The graveyard has been extended considerably on its north-east side, where the land falls away, giving it now a very irregular shape.

The village itself appears to have no surviving buildings dating to earlier than the 18th century and many probably belong to the 19th century. The exception according to the Royal Commission appears to be Maesyrafon also known as Llaisafon (105478), formerly an inn which was originally a two-unit 17th-century stone building.

Excavations on land opposite the Llaisafon Inn in 2006 produced evidence of a medieval building beside the road in the form of sill-beam slots and also a limekiln which provided a radiocarbon date of AD 892 – 1153; the kiln, it has been tentatively suggested, could have been linked to the construction of an earlier church.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.