

Nercwys

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Introduction

Nercwys, some 3km south of Mold, lies on the eastern fringe of the Clwydians, and is served by a network of lanes. The modern settlement straggles along a shelf that interrupts the prevailing south-west to north-east slope. One or two small streams drop down the slope without creating particularly marked valleys, and the church overlooks a slight saddle into which the road drops before rising again. The River Terrig, a tributary of the Alyn, runs northwards less than one kilometre to the east.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Nercwys 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 need to be modified 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. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The origins of this settlement are obscure. The shape of the churchyard might indicate an early medieval origin but there is no convincing evidence to corroborate the theory.

The church, an ancient chapelry of Mold, is first documented in 1291, when the place was termed Nerchgwyys. The meaning of the name is obscure but could combine either 'hanner' [half] or 'anner' [heifer] with 'cwys' [furrow].

The development of Nercwys through the Middle Ages and even into the post-medieval era remains to be elucidated. The first depiction on an estate map of 1734 shows Plas-yn-Illan to the south of the churchyard, the White Lion Inn at the crossroads and a small number of dwellings scattered along the road.

The heritage to 1750

St Mary's church (100074) has a late medieval arched-braced roof, but the church also contains 17th century work as well as 19th century modifications from enlargement in 1847 and restoration work in 1883. The western tower arch appears to be Norman, but the tower itself is of indeterminate date. The sedilia has been made up of late 15th/early 16th century fragments of the former rood screen. There is a late medieval pulpit, and some of the stained glass in the east window may date to 1483-5. Sepulchral slabs in the south porch include part of a 13th century coffin lid, other slabs of 1250-1300 and some of 14th century date.

The churchyard (19913) is now of irregular elongated shape. Both the estate map of 1734 and the tithe survey of 1838 depict a more compact enclosure, the elongation on the north being an

extension, although little ground evidence of this modification remains. A curvilinear 'llan' is possible, but only the east side is convincing. The churchyard contains a baluster sundial and also the Nerquis Hall vault which dates to 1737.

Nercwys (Nerquis) Hall (100073), lies to the south-east of the village and is a stone, H-plan building, dated to 1638 with later additions. Its surrounding park has a Grade II listing in the Cadw/ICOMOS register. Pen-y-bryn (19916) is a much altered 17th century house, but to consider as part of a putative nucleated settlement at Nercwys is probably stretching a point.

A field named Erw'r gaer (102526) appears on the Tithe schedule, a few hundred metres to the west of the church, but nothing of significance has been noted here there.

Faint ridge and furrow (19914) covers the hillside west of the village, appearing to run along rather than down the slope. It spreads over a reasonably large proportion of OS plot 3640 and shows again to the north in the unnumbered field behind Isfryn; post-war aerial photography suggests further ridge and furrow running down the slope behind the playing field to the north. Whether it now survives is not known.

In the mid-19th century, a few quilletts remained just to the north of the church, with many more to the east in the vicinity of Pen-y-bryn. Almost all have now been amalgamated into larger fields.

A platform (19915) of unknown function is cut into the slope in a pasture field to the north-east of the church.



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