

Churchstoke

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Introduction

Churchstoke lies at the junction of two main roads, the A490 and A489, in the extreme east of Montgomeryshire. It is just over 5km to the south-east of Montgomery and one of the few settlements in this part of Wales that lies to the east of Offa's Dyke. The village has grown up on a spur of dry land projecting towards the confluence of two watercourses, the Caebitra and the Camlad, with the church itself on the edge of the shelf above these small rivers. With broad flood plains to the south-west and south-east, the steep-sided valley of the Camlad to the north, and the heights of Corndon and Roundton to the north-east, Churchstoke lies at the interface of several topographical zones.

This brief report examines Churchstoke's emergence and development up to 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 provides 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 may 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).



Churchstoke, photo 01-c-0106, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

Churchstoke is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as *Cirestoc*, the Old English *stoc* here meaning 'place' or just possibly 'settlement'. The Welsh name, recorded at some point between 1447 and 1489 was *yr Ystog* and looks to be a derivation of *stoc*.

On the evidence of the Domesday survey, the manor of Churchstoke was certainly in existence before the Norman Conquest and the church was an early medieval foundation: the morphology of the churchyard corroborates this view.

The development of the village in the Middle Ages is unchronicled, and it is impossible to determine on the evidence that is currently available whether there was a nucleated settlement here. The church became a dependency of nearby Chirbury Priory (in Shropshire) and in earlier centuries lay in the parish of Chirbury.

By 1840 the picture as presented on the tithe map is of the church with an open space, perhaps a village green, immediately to the north and running down as far as the Camlad. The Court House Inn looks as though it may have encroached on part of this open area. Houses were beginning to spread up the road to Lydham and Bishop's Castle, but had not yet reached Churchstoke Hall. On the far side of the Camlad, there were small groups of houses at Green and further west around Coed Cottage. The bridge linking the two banks has been attributed to the late 18th or early 19th century, but may well have replaced an earlier structure. In 1750 it is unlikely that the community would have been very different, though perhaps a bit smaller.

More than most, Churchstoke reveals a mixture of Welsh and English influences resulting from its border location. Its fieldnames, for instance, show a predominance of English terms but with a few Welsh examples.

The heritage to 1750

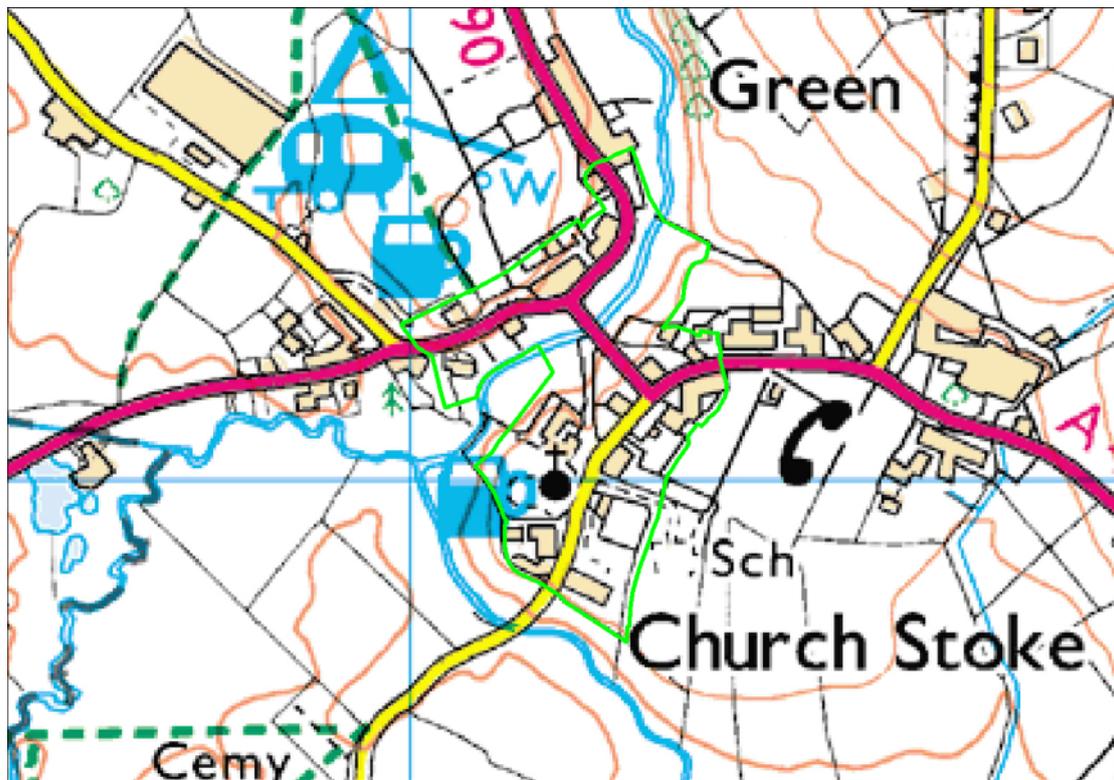
The present church of St Nicholas (7541) was largely built in 1815 and remodelled around 1867, creating a complicated phasing. Only the base of the tower – 13th century in date – survives of the medieval structure that certainly existed here. Inside there is a 14th century font bowl which was found buried in the churchyard, a Jacobean chest and a peal of five church bells from 1721. The other furnishings and fittings are of the 19th century.

The raised churchyard (7542) has a curved outline on the east, while the Tithe map and the natural fall of the ground suggest more curved sides on the north and west respectively than are now apparent.

Only one building predates 1600. Churchstoke Hall (20588) was erected in 1590, has a Grade II listing, but lies away from the village core. Other Grade II buildings are Fir Court (20582) with an inscription of 1685, and a nearby stable block (30467) of 18th century origin, both also away from the core, and the Court House Inn (32559) which has a sub-medieval core but was remodelled in the late 18th or early 19th century. Other listed building studies suggest that a number of houses and other buildings were constructed in the village towards the end of the 18th century.

The subsidiary hamlet of Green presumably took its name from the tract of ground in the valley bottom which also included land on the other side of the river around the Court House Inn and the church. Termed Churchstoke Green in the tithe survey but not a village green in the conventional sense, this was common land and had probably witnessed earlier encroachments including the cottages known as Cambrook and the Willows as well as the Court House.

Ridge and furrow cultivation (4550) has been recognised in the field west of Churchstoke Hall.



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