

Kerry

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Introduction

Kerry lies on the A489 linking Newtown in Powys with Craven Arms in Shropshire and is some 5km to the east of the former. High above the village, the Kerry Hills sweep down towards the Severn Valley, interrupted only by a valley holding the headwaters of the small River Mule. Kerry occupies a north-facing shelf above the valley, the church sitting on a spur projecting towards the river. Most of the settlement is on level or gently sloping ground, but a motte-and-bailey castle tops an isolated hillock 600m south of the church.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Kerry 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 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 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).



Kerry, photo 79-cw-0020, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

Neither the shape of the churchyard nor the dedication of the church would suggest an early medieval origin for Kerry, yet it is likely that this was the site of the mother church for the district in the pre-Conquest era. It was reputedly founded by Cadwgan in the 8th century. It was later recorded for posterity when it was re-dedicated in 1176 by archdeacon Giraldus Cambrensis who claimed the church for the diocese of St David's and excommunicated the Bishop of St Asaph at the church door.

The earliest reference appears in the late 12th century as Keri, the name of the local commote (district). This was once thought to have the meaning of either the mountain ash or medlar [a small tree similar to the apple], but modern scholarship favours an interpretation of 'the land of Câr'. The church dedication was first recorded in 1246 and in 1281 it was Lanvihangel in commote of Kery, Mihangel being Michael. The Welsh Llanvihangel-yng-Ngheri is still printed on Ordnance Survey maps, but the earliest cited appearance of this is about 1562.

The medieval development of Kerry is unchronicled. The lord of the manor, in this instance the bishop of St Davids, was granted the right to hold a fair in 1290 and this might imply some sort of settlement here, though perhaps significantly there was no equivalent grant of a market at that time. It was also at one time the centre for a local cloth industry. The layout of the settlement as depicted on the mid-19th century Tithe map, and the slightly earlier Ordnance Survey surveyors' drawing of 1817, is of a compact village strung along the main road with what is either a small green or market place in front of the church [still distinguishable as a parking area for the church today and known as The Square].

The heritage to 1750

St Michael's church (7544) is a double-naved structure with a large west tower. The arcade survives from the Norman church here and from the 14th century the tower and the chancel arcade. The rest was rebuilt in 1882-3. Its complicated history is increased by a documented altercation between Giraldus Cambrensis and the bishop of St Asaph in 1176 when the new church was being built, and which was then rededicated, to St Michael. The earlier dedication could have been to a St Gwyr, as inscribed on its bell of around 1410. Inside the roofs are of the 14th or 15th century, there are a late medieval font and piscina and the Victorian screens incorporate fragments of their medieval predecessors.

The polygonal churchyard (7545) has seen changes to its shape in recent times. A low scarp is visible inside the present northern perimeter which links with the boundary of The Nook on the north-east and represents the line of the original enclosure. This implies a rather more curvilinear outline, and speculatively it can be argued that the east side has been shaved back to a straight line.

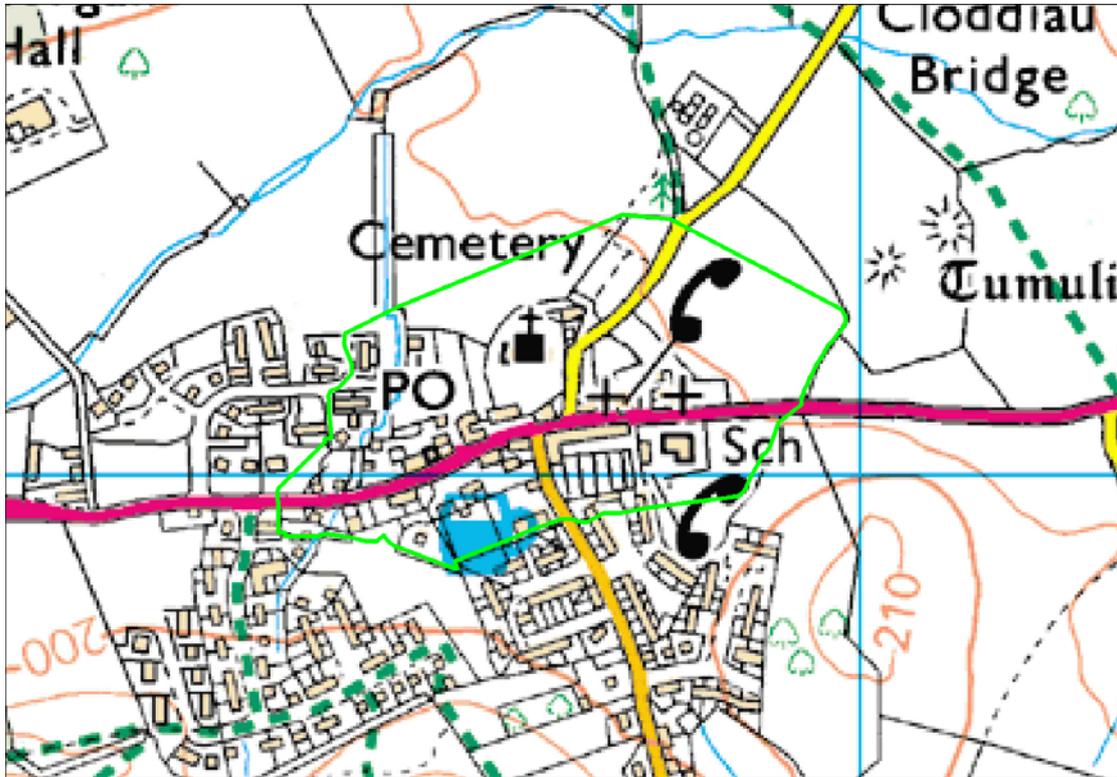
Minor earthworks of uncertain nature, about 130m west of the church, have now been destroyed during housing development.

The church apart, there are no listed buildings of any age in the village. Two Grade II Regency houses, Dolforgan Hall (32592) and The Moat (7714), both lie beyond the periphery. There is thus virtually no guide to how the medieval and Jacobethan settlement at Kerry may have developed over the centuries. On topographical grounds it can be suggested that this was on the south side of the churchyard (as today) and that probably a trackway had run along the valley from east to west for centuries, acting as a focus for settlement. Whether the modern A489 follows the line of that trackway precisely is open to debate.

Distinctive traces of ridge and furrow cultivation are visible on the hill slopes to the south of the village (7546 and 7547).

A generally well-preserved motte and bailey (996; SAM Mg050), set 600m to the south of the church, may have been thrown up as the caput (or chief seat) of the commote of Ceri by Madog ap Idnerth who died around 1140. It has been partially damaged by modern activity.

A large sub-circular enclosure encompasses Kerry. This is probably more likely to be deer-park associated with the castle, though we cannot rule out another premise, that it marks the precinct of the pre-Conquest mother church.



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