

Manafon

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Introduction

Manafon lies on the B4390 in the hills of central Montgomeryshire to the west of the Severn valley. It is about 8km south of Llanfair Caereinion and 11km north of Newtown. Afon Rhiw, a small tributary of the Severn, follows a valley whose floor is never much more than 300m wide. The village of Manafon lies on the valley floor, the church little more than 100m north of the river. Ridging in neighbouring fields signals the channels of earlier watercourses and fluvial deposits, and beyond the valley sides slope steeply upwards. It is a small settlement but there has been recent infilling of the historic core. A large caravan park covers the ground between the church and motte.

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

History of development

Virtually nothing is known of Manafon's origin and development. The church dedication does not automatically herald an early medieval foundation, though some 'Michael dedications' are known to be pre-Conquest. The shape of the earlier churchyard shape is more suggestive, 19th century maps depicting a more curvilinear appearance than is currently apparent.

The name is first documented in 1254 as *Manauon* with *Mannavon* in 1338. The modern spelling first appears early in the reign of Elizabeth, c.1566. Expert opinion favours an interpretation of the 'plain associated with Anafon' where the first element is Welsh *ma* meaning 'plain, field or place' and the second a personal name. This is now preferred to *afon* meaning 'river' which was formerly in favour.

For the medieval and post-medieval picture we have only early maps to go, none of which are that much earlier than the turn of the 19th century. However, these maps hint at a very sparse pattern of dwellings. The Bee Hive public house was at the beginning of the 19th century simply known as the Manafon ale-house and at the most there may have been a couple of cottages beside the road, together with Moat Farm on the opposite bank of the Rhiw. There is nothing to suggest that any dwellings were constructed between the two medieval features, the church and the motte.

The heritage to 1750

St Michael's church (7582) is a single-chamber building with a timber bell-turret at the west end. The original building is probably 14th or 15th century, but it was heavily restored in the Victorian era. Inside there is a medieval stoup, some fragments of stained glass and a restored 15th century roof, and perhaps most interestingly a cell which is thought to be 14th century and thus the oldest in Montgomeryshire.

The churchyard (7583) as depicted on the tithe map was more curvilinear than today, but none of the remaining boundary gives an impression of age. (7583).

The small motte (108), sculpted from a natural hillock, lies beside a small stream feeding into the Rhiw. Little of the bailey survives above ground and the motte has also suffered from the proximity of Moat Farm. Its history is unknown. A ford across the Rhiw linked Moat Farm to the highway. We may speculate that in earlier centuries it linked the castle and church.

The former rectory (42121) 250m to the east of the church, was built at the end of the 18th century and may have had at least two predecessors, one of them burning down in 1714. The building is at least as interesting because of its occupiers who have included Walter Davies (Walter Mechain) and the poet R. S. Thomas.

Earthworks in the fields around the settlement are primarily natural in origin resulting from fluvial activity, though there are also relict field banks.



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