

Bangor-is-y-coed

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Introduction

Bangor-is-y-coed is situated beside the A525 where it crosses the River Dee en route from Wrexham to Whitchurch (Shropshire). It is 7km south-east of the former.

The settlement has developed on the east bank of the River Dee. Whilst not on the lowest part of the flood plain, it is nevertheless so close to the river as to require the construction of a flood defence embankment around the northern side of the village. Eastwards, the ground rises gently away from the river.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Bangor up to 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to examine other sources of information and particularly regarding the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered solely 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 adopted in the HER to provide researchers with information that is specific to the individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

In the early 7th century AD, Bangor was claimed to be the largest monastery in western Britain, ruled by Abbot Dinoot. Founded, it is said, by Deiniol who died in either 572 or 584, he was responsible too for founding the other Bangor on the northern coastline of Gwynedd. The Venerable Bede in his great *Ecclesiastical History* wrote that there were hundreds of monks here, other sources specifying 2400. Bede also recorded that 1200 were put to death by Aethelfrith of Northumbria's forces after the battle of Chester in c.616.

Bede further reported that the Bangor monastic community was divided into seven sections each with more than 300 monks ruled by its own abbot. The presence of so many monks at Bangor seems hardly credible, and it has been suggested that if this figure is to be seen as at all realistic, it must have included monks in outlying communities that were subject to Bangor.

The term *bangor* is normally translated as a 'wattle fence', a reference to the enclosure erected around an early monastic site. The 'coed' element presumably refers to the proximity of a wood, but the name Bangor Is-coed is first encountered in Edward Lhuyd's notes of 1699. The alternative form of Bangor Monachorum - 'Bangor of the monks' – is only a little earlier, appearing in a document of 1607.

This is the earliest settlement to be known by name in Wrexham Maelor. Bede termed it both *Bancornaburg* and *Bancor* in 731. Later, in 1270, it was termed *Bankerbur*, and it first appeared in its present form in 1277/8. The *burh* element, now lost from the modern name but appearing regularly in the Middle Ages (as in *Bonkerbury* in c.1278) is usually interpreted as a ‘defended enclosure’ or ‘stronghold’, but alternative meanings are possible and it has been suggested recently that it could refer to an enclosure erected for the protection of the inhabitants of a small settlement that grew up around the monastery. It seems unlikely that the issue will ever be resolved with any certainty.

Equally unsubstantiated is the proposition that after a period of desertion following the massacre of the monks by the Northumbrian forces, a new church serving the area was erected on the site in or even before the 8th century, and that this became the centre of a large parish spanning the Dee valley. Indeed, the history and development of Bangor throughout the Middle Ages is obscure; virtually nothing seems to be known about it.

Bangor emerges only at the end of the 17th century when Edward Lhuyd noted 26 houses in the village, and by the mid-19th century it consisted of houses spread along what is now the High Street and beside the Whitchurch Road, with a few close to the church on the Overton Road.

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Dunawd (102683) incorporates 14th and 15th-century work in the fabric of the west wall of the nave, and the chancel, including windows and such internal features as the roofs. Further additions were made in the early 18th century when the tower was completely rebuilt, and the aisles in the 19th century, with the porch being added in 1877. Most of the interior fittings are post-medieval but there is a late medieval font, fragmentary stained glass a 14th-century sepulchral slab (the only in-situ survivor of several known to have been found in the churchyard), and some of the beams from the medieval rood screen. The churchyard is rectangular – a detailed measured survey of all the grave markers was completed some years ago.



Bangor-is-y-coed, photo 04-c-0020 © CPAT, 2013

Bangor bridge (100139) with its five arches was formerly dated to 1658, but that date is now thought to refer to its repair, the original structure being of late 15th or early 16th-century origin.

There do not appear to be any particularly old houses in the village, other than the timber-framed White House (105355) on High Street, which is considered to be of late 17th-century date.

The precise location of the early monastery (100149) is unknown, although there has been considerable speculation in the past and this will no doubt continue. It has been assumed, though without any substantive evidence, that the present parish church is on the site of its monastic predecessor. The ruins of the monastery were mentioned by William of Malmesbury, and John Leland in the first half of the 16th century claimed the survival of the names of two of its gates, Porthwgan to the north and Port Clays (Porth Klais) to the south. Rice Rees' comments in 1836 that traces of extensive ranges of monastic buildings were still observable at Bangor should, however, be taken with a pinch of salt. Derek Pratt has emphasised that the river terrace on which the monastery sat may have been eroded by subsequent river action, thus rendering the physical remains wholly irrecoverable. In succinct form he has summed up the monastery at Bangor as a 'considerable Christian seminary (size debatable), laid out (exact site unknown) on the flood plain of the Dee (extent disputable), occupying a (then) secluded valley floor hemmed in by high ground, typical of the siting of early Welsh monasteries'. No one is likely to do better!

There is no evidence of a circular churchyard at Bangor but Pratt argues that changes in the course of the river and the construction of the river bridge, together perhaps with the re-alignment of the roads leading to it, might perhaps have truncated the original outline. Excavations in 1986 behind the hall south of the churchyard recovered bones, and Pratt reported the discovery of a skull (105261) at Millstone Cottage on the Whitchurch Road at about the same time.

Suggestions that the street pattern may have been modified in the late medieval period or soon after were outlined in the previous paragraph. In addition an 18th-century estate map points to changes in the alignment of the Overton Road - unfortunately only a small fragment of the village is depicted and it is not possible to map the alterations with any accuracy, though the curving boundary running north beside Orchard Villa could be relevant in this context. It can also be noted here that the straight B5426 approaching Bangor across the flood plain from the west was constructed as late as 1819 to link the village with the coal-mining district around Ruabon.

The remnants of Bangor's medieval fields are depicted on the tithe map: sub-divided fields are shown running off the road to Worthenbury, south-west of Willow Court, and to the south of the village where the A525 now passes over the Overton Road. Arable open fields are documented in the 15th century, while Althrey Meadow to the south-west of the village was a common meadow. Ridge and furrow survives just to the south of the sewage farm off the road to Worthenbury (105262).



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