

Hanmer

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SJ 4549 3968

Introduction

Hanmer lies just off the A539 that links Wrexham, some 16km to the north-west, with Whitchurch in Shropshire. The village has developed on a glacial moraine in a prominent position at the head of Hanmer Mere, and this location may well have been an attractive one for an emerging settlement.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Hanmer up to 1750. For the more recent history of the village, it may be necessary to examine other sources of information and particularly for the origins and nature of some 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

Hangmere is recorded in 1269 and *Hengem(er)e* at much the same time. *Hanmere* appears in 1391 and the modern form of the name for the first time in 1417. In Welsh sources the mere was named as *Llyn Hanmer* in 1497. Identified as an Old English personal name, an individual called *Hagena* gave his name to the mere, presumably in the pre-Conquest era, but if a manor was established here before the Normans arrived, no record of it has yet been encountered.

There is a tradition that St Chad, later to become bishop of Mercia, established a cell on the site in the middle of the 7th century. Barring some remarkable discovery this is likely to remain only a tradition. The church here is supposed to have existed in 1110 when a portion of its revenues were reputedly granted to the fledgling community established at Haughmond Abbey near Shrewsbury, and it lay within the medieval Cheshire deanery of Malpas. There is too, indirect evidence of a church here at the time of the Domesday survey (1087). Bettisfield was a township of Hanmer and was recorded in Domesday as having a priest. Yet there is no indication of an historic church at Bettisfield and it is plausible to assume that the priest was at Hanmer.

A manor must have developed here in the Middle Ages, and the Hanmer family, taking their name probably from the lake or the manor, rose to prominence after their arrival in the area during the reign of Edward I in the late 13th century. Haughmond Abbey's lands here were bought by Sir Thomas Hanmer after the Dissolution in the late 1530s, and it has been suggested that it was the development of his estate that may have fostered the growth of the

village. Yet although Hanmer has the appearance of a nucleated settlement that might have had early origins, in truth there is little to guide any determination as to when it emerged as a village.

A school was established here by 1625 and around 1699 Edward Lhuyd was able to record 25 houses around the church. An early map of 1779 indicates dwellings along and just off the main street and Thomas Pennant in his *Tour of Wales* published in 1784 referred to the 'little town of Hanmer'. The picture then is not so very different from today except for the very recent development to the east of the main street.

The heritage to 1750

Nothing of the earliest recorded church is apparent in the present building dedicated to St Chad (100183). It is predominantly late Perpendicular (c.1490), though the tower, so it is claimed, was only completed in 1570. The chancel was added in 1720. In 1889 the interior was completely gutted by fire but its extensive restoration was largely complete by 1892. Internal furnishings and fittings included several pieces of 17th and 18th-century furniture, three later 18th-century memorial brasses, and a chandelier originally in Bangor church which carries the date 1727.

The older part of the churchyard is to the north of the church; much of that to the south is a modern extension, the divide between the two still visible. There is a fine octagonal medieval churchyard cross shaft supporting a much worn, 14th-century carved cross-head (100184), standing by the south-east corner of the church.

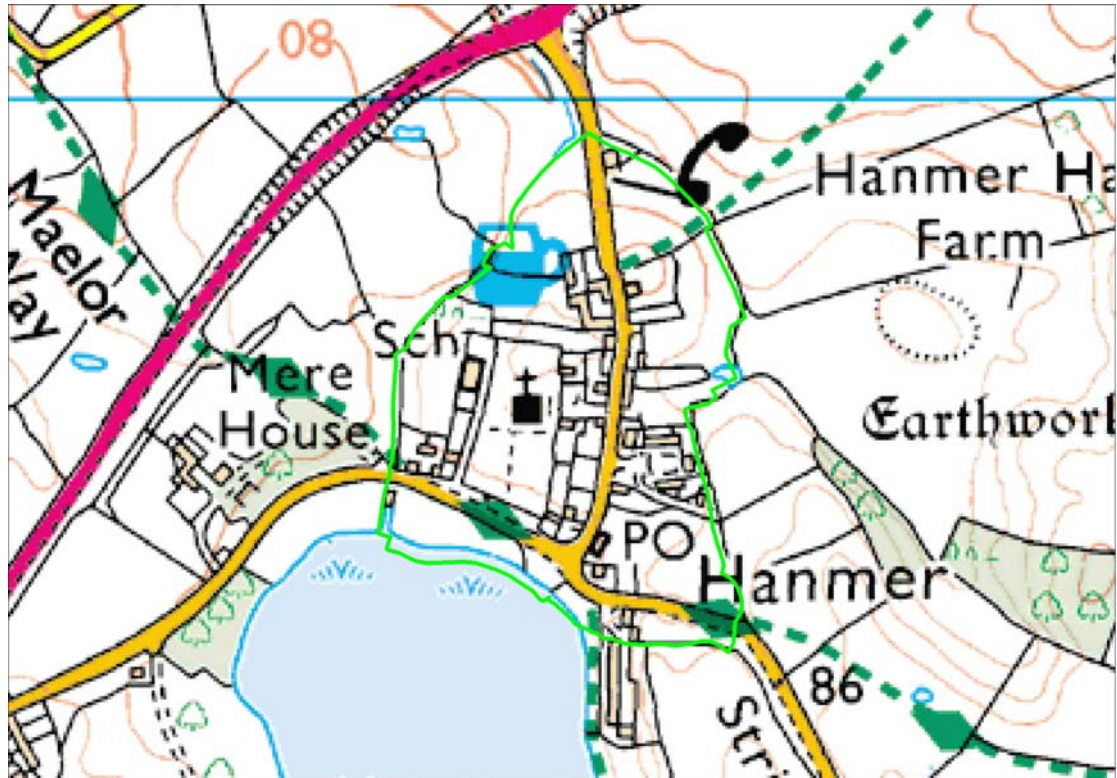
In a field 200m to the east of the village is a large low-lying oval mound (100181), approximately 110m long and around 75m wide. Though almost certainly glacial in origin, its form has been modified – the face of the mound has been scarped and it is ditched around the base, with an outer bank on its southern side. Any possibility that this was an unusual castle or ringwork seems to have been ruled out by the experts, and it is generally held that this is a moated site, albeit one of an atypical design, with its location in Vicarage Meadow perhaps suggesting that it was formerly the site of the parsonage.

The village appears to be basically a linear ribbon development along the main north-south street with the church and its yard lying back from this, and accessed via the Square (though this appears to have been a less prepossessing feature in the 19th century if the tithe map is a good guide. The linearity of the main street has led the Royal Commission (RCAHMW) to propose that Hanmer is a planned settlement originally set out (at an unknown date) along a single street, an attractive explanation of the village morphology, although there is nothing in the known records to support such an early development.

The possible presence of an earthwork enclosure around the village also needs consideration. Along the western side of the village a natural but now dry stream bed appears to have been enhanced to form a defensive ditch (105279). This feature forms the western boundaries to fields OS nos 3875, 4081 and 4682 with the land rising steeply on the other side. To the north of the last field the line is continued in the stream which curves around to join the road at a point opposite the garage. A similar natural boundary exists on the north-eastern side of the settlement though this is less forbidding (105298). Here defence, or at least demarcation, seems to have come from a strengthening of the boundary at the back of the old tenement plots. A bank in OS no.5690 is continued, most visibly, in the rear boundary of the Old Police House. The Tithe Map suggests that this eastern boundary once extended much further to the south, but later field enclosures (OS nos 6570, 6863 and 7057) and modern development have obscured the picture in this area. If this is an authentic enclosure, and at present the evidence is not compelling, it is difficult to envisage the circumstances in which it came into existence. Perhaps it is no more than a coincidence in the layout of boundaries.

The architecture of Hanmer is predominantly in late 18th to /early 19th-century brick with The Hanmer Arms (105299) being a fine example. The present school dates from 1676 but was substantially restored in 1850. Both Magpie Cottage (102849) beside the Mere and The Cottage on the Square are 17th-century, timber-framed buildings, while the Vicarage (105301) next to the church is also 17th-century but in red brick.

Little archaeological work has been undertaken in Hanmer. The exception was to the south-east of the church close to the T-junction of roads by the mere where medieval pottery but very little structural evidence was found in the plot in which Dove Cottage was subsequently built.



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