

Marchwiell

15682
SJ 3571 4771

Introduction

The modern village of Marchwiell has grown up on either side of the A525 road between Wrexham and Whitchurch, approximately 3km south-west of the former. The topography consists of gently undulating low hills, predominantly down to pasture which lie to the south of the River Clywedog.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Marchwiell up to the year 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

Extremely little is known of the origins of Marchwiell. From the field survey alone the settlement itself might appear to be relatively recent, perhaps no older than the early 18th century, though as an administrative area, it goes back much further, well into the 14th century as an extent of the lordship of Bromfield and Yale in 1315 testifies.

The physical evidence for a medieval precursor to the church and by extension any putative settlement around it is suggested only by the remains of a possible cross base in the churchyard which is presumed to be 14th or 15th-century in date. However, the earliest reference – to *Marchocil* – comes from the Norwich Taxation of 1254 and confirms the medieval presence of a chapel, though there is nothing in this that points to an earlier, pre-Conquest origin. The name is interpreted as meaning ‘large saplings’ and possibly suggests deliberate cultivation, but is otherwise uninformative.

Information boards within the church record that Marchwiell parish was carved out of Bangor-on-Dee sometime around 1535, and that prior to this there had been a chapel, dependent on Bangor, on the site of the present church. This, however, is probably misleading – the 1254 taxation refers to Marchwiell not as a chapel but as a church in its own right, a parson is recorded there in 1359 and the great St Asaph historian, Archdeacon Thomas, was inclined to see the separation of Marchwiell from its mother church as an occurrence much earlier than the 16th century.

The proposal that the place-name reflects the nature of the material from which the first chapel was constructed should be treated with considerable caution; it might be construed as an imaginative attempt to parallel the place-name origin of the mother church at Bangor.

It is assumed in the absence of any reliable evidence to the contrary that one stimulus for the siting and growth of the settlement is due to the nearby coal and iron production centres. Documentary evidence suggests that there was a church and community at Marchwiell early in the 17th century, and in 1626, a messuage in the settlement was gifted to the church, the rental to pay for repairs. More speculatively, it might be suggested that the establishment of the church and its ecclesiastical parish reflected the need of a developing settlement for its own spiritual centre. However, as late as *c.*1699 Edward Lhuyd was able to note in his *Parochial Queries* that there were only five houses and a smithy around the church, and as far as can be established there are no pre-19th-century maps that would provide an idea of the scale of settlement here.

The proximity of the railway line giving access to the marketing centre at Wrexham with the siting of a station at Marchwiell undoubtedly initiated the 19th-century growth along the A525.

The heritage to 1750

The present church (100146), dedicated to St Deiniol and Marcella (but formerly, it is believed, to St Deiniol alone through its association with Bangor, and also in the past occasionally with St Marcellus), is a Georgian structure, mostly dating from the years 1778 to 1789. It has some 19th-century additions including a north transept and a polygonal apse attached to the chancel. Within the church there are brass and marble memorials and some fine stone glass, all of which are from the 18th century. The churchyard is rectangular.

Other than the church, no buildings of any significant architectural or historic interest were noted. The earliest buildings cluster along the street frontages around the church and to the west. On external evidence alone, these are no earlier than the 18th century. A former smithy (104290) is now part of a row of cottages west of the church and appears to date from the late 18th century, while a malthouse at Pen-y-llan at the western end of the village contains a beam that carries a date of 1703.

Traces of possible ridge and furrow recorded in two fields, one to the rear of the Red Lion Public House, south of the church, the other to the south of Hollyhedge on the eastern edge of the village, point to open-field agriculture but whether this was associated with a settlement at Marchwiell or elsewhere cannot be determined.



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