

Pentrefoelas

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Introduction

Pentrefoelas lies on the A5, eight miles south-east of Llanrwst in the Conwy Valley. From Pentrefoelas, roads run north-east to Denbigh (A543), south-west to Ysbyty Ifan and north-west to Llanrwst (B5113), in addition to the A5 running east to west. The village is situated in the valley of the little River Merddwr, to the south of the Mynydd Hiraethog uplands. The village centre and most of the older buildings, dating from the late 18th century, lie on the north side of the river.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Pentrefoelas up to the year 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 only 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 will require modification 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. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

Meaning the village or settlement near Foelas (for which see below), all of the place-name variations for Pentrefoelas are of post-Reformation origin. The earliest is *Pentre vidog chapel* in 1680, a reference to the nearby chapel of ease and not one that can be taken to indicate a settlement. In 1801 the focus instead was on Foelas with *Capel Voelas* and in 1838 it was known as *Pentre Foelas*.

There are a number of references to the chapel pre-dating the 1772 parish church, its site marked by a yew tree in the playing fields south of the bridge. Archdeacon Thomas at the end of the 19th century noted that ‘..a small chapel, variously known as 'Capel y Fidog', 'Capel y Foelas' or 'Capel y Pentre' was built....about 200 yards from the Pentrefoelas Bridge, but within the bounds of Ysppyty parish....The last lay reader died in 1769’. Another writer in 1974 claimed that the chapel existed without a burial ground. Owing to the inadequacy of the old chapelry, and with an expanding population in the area, a new church was built in the settlement.

Pentrefoelas village centre, containing estate housing, remains essentially unchanged from its origins in the late 18th century as a small manorial estate village, relating to Voelas. The Tithe survey of the 1840s shows a church, mill, the Voelas Arms and a few houses on the north side of the river, but no buildings to the south of it.

The heritage to 1750

The village appears to take its name from the 'Foel Las', a motte (100416) which lies a short distance to the north of the village. Possibly thrown up by Owain Gwynedd in about 1164, the mound is around 7.5m high, and was created by scarping a natural hillock. A possible bailey lies to the south. On top of the motte, foundations for a square stone tower were found in 1882, while Cathcart King, one of the leading experts on castles in the later 20th century referred to a possible ring wall exposed by land slippage.

The motte could possibly have been the focus for a settlement which pre-dates the present village, but there is no evidence to strengthen what is really no more than a speculative comment.

Old Voelas, half a mile north-north-west of the village centre and lying below the motte, was demolished in 1819, though some window tracery, panelling and painted heraldry were retained and incorporated into other buildings. Otherwise one small cottage remains, and that is much altered. The stone barns and house presently standing at Hen Voelas probably occupy the site of the demolished buildings. According to Edward Hubbard (1986), it was the principal house of the Pentrefoelas uplands from 1545 until its demolition. It consisted of a large unit-system group of rectangular 16th and 17th-century buildings.

Pentrefoelas parish church (105469) was built in 1857-9, replacing a church of 1766 (the first on this site) which had a south transept of 1774. It has virtually nothing of architectural distinction. The only survivals from the earlier church are two wall memorials and a disused font. The churchyard is virtually rectangular.

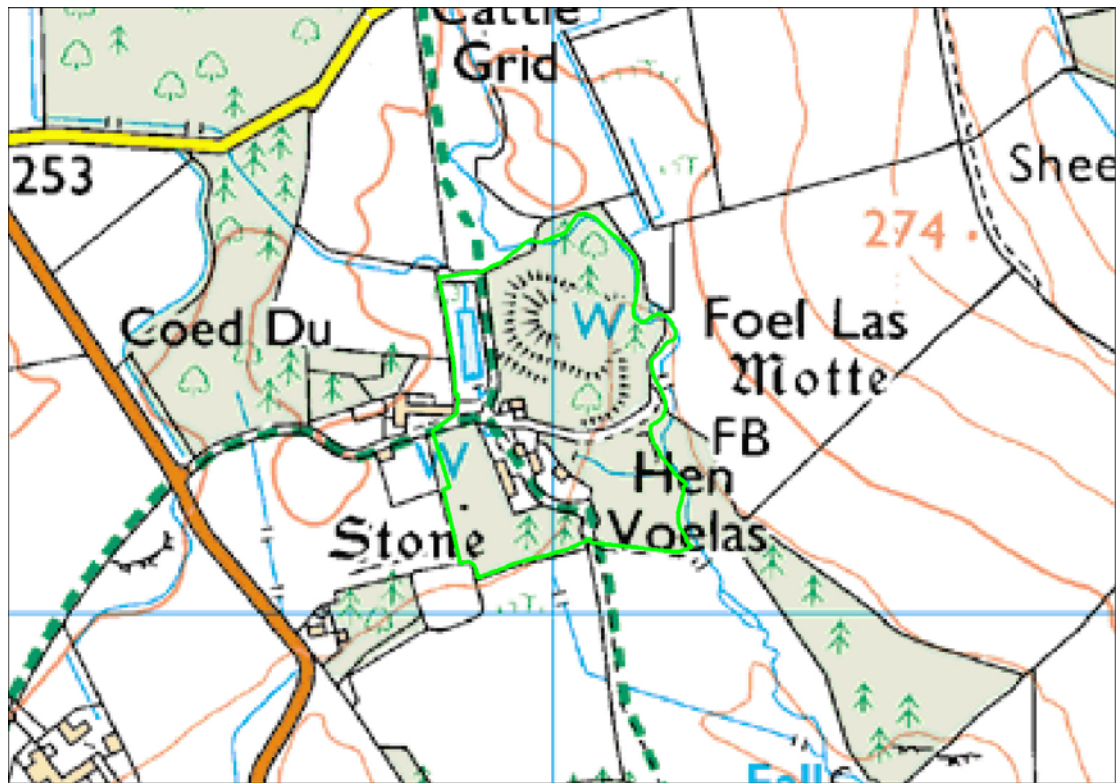
With the Voelas Arms (105547), there is a belief – but unsubstantiated – that an inn could have occupied the spot from an early date on the important route westwards to Ireland. However, the first recorded license is only from 1762. The southern part of the building is 18th-century in origin, but it was re-fronted in 1839-1840 and also extended to the rear at that date. Nant y creuau (105546), to the east of the village, is an 18th-century stone building. Most of the stone-built houses in the village centre were built in the 1850s.

The mill (105548), on the eastern edge of the village has an overshot wheel fed from a millpond. It is known to have a date of 1815 on it, referring to a rebuilding at that time, so it must be 18th-century if not earlier in origin. Adjacent was a corn-drying kiln, still largely intact in 2000.

The bridge carrying the B5113 over a small stream, a short distance to the west of the church has a single arch and carries a date of 1782.

The site of Capel Pentre Fidog (105556), the medieval chapel, is as noted above located in the playing field south of the bridge, its position marked by a yew tree. The only description of it is by the last survivor of the congregation, who died in 1847, and who told of a clay floor covered with rushes.

Finally mention should be made of the Levelinus stone (100403), inscribed in Latin and Welsh and attributable to the period 1198-1230. Now in the National Museum Wales, its find spot is not known precisely, though it came from the township of Tir yr Abad and lauds Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's grant of an estate to the abbey of Aberconwy.



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