

Dyserth

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Introduction

Dyserth lies at the foot of Moel Hiraddug, towards the northern end of the Clwydian hills, approximately 3km east-north-east of Rhuddlan and 3.5km south-south-west of Prestatyn. The older, lower part of the village occupies the sides of a narrow valley, into which Dyserth waterfall pours a stream. The majority of the older limestone-built cottages stand on the lower slopes of the west side of the valley. The stream below the waterfall is canalised, but previously was prone to flooding the whole of lower Dyserth.

Dyserth was for long in the historic county of Flintshire. But transferred to the new county of Clwyd in 1974, it became part of the Denbighshire local authority area in 1996 when Clwyd was broken up.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Dyserth up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it might be necessary to look at other sources of information and in particular 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

The name Dyserth is thought to be indicative of an early phase of Christian evangelisation by eremitic holy men. The name occurs as a title for several parishes in Wales, and in the form 'Dysart' it is common in Ireland. A pre-Conquest origin has always seemed likely and there is a growing realisation that Dyserth was perhaps the mother church for the region and thus of a higher status than most early medieval ecclesiastical foundations.

The manor is first mentioned in Domesday Book in AD 1087, as *Dissard*, one of the berewicks of Rhuddlan. Later forms include *Dissarth* in 1241, *Dyssard* in 1315 and *Dysserth* in the years 1458-9.

In 1093 the church and manor was bestowed on the monks of St Werburgh's in Chester. The growth of the settlement around the church is impossible to gauge at present; a nucleated settlement seems likely and even some nucleation before the Norman Conquest is plausible, given the importance of the church.

Dyserth was, in the past, distinguished for its castle. The location had been occupied intermittently since Neolithic times, but in 1241, Henry III began work on a castle here. In 1248 it was complete and interestingly a number of burgage plots near the castle were offered

to tenants. These are thought to have been to the east and south-east of the castle entrance, rather than on the site of the present village. The castle and presumably the new borough were destroyed in 1263 by a Welsh force.

In the last years of the 17th century, Edward Lhuyd's correspondent noted that there were 35 houses by the church, a remarkable number compared with what is usually recorded for small settlements in the region, and one which we should perhaps treat with a pinch of salt. Richard Colt Hoare during his travels in north Wales in 1801 commented on the castle but evidently saw nothing of interest in the village.

There was formerly a fulling mill at Dyserth, and the name 'Pandy' still survives as well as 'Weavers Lane' as a testimony to the former importance of the woollen industry in the neighbourhood.

The Tithe survey of 1839 shows a small settlement, including the church, at Lower Dyserth. Houses extended along Waterfall Road from Carreg Heilin Lane to Weavers Lane. This still forms the core of the present village, although 20th-century housing estates have been added on to the west and north. Pendre stood at the top of Waterfall Road (where old farm buildings still stand today), but at this date there was very little of Upper Dyserth - three or four buildings only are shown on what is the modern High Street, with a few more around Bryn y Felin. Common land separated the upper and lower villages, and there were further areas of common on the rocky higher ground. The enclosed land was mostly arable.

Early attempts were made to mine lead and copper at Dyserth, but such poor results were obtained during the reign of Edward II that the works were abandoned. Later on, lead mining particularly at Talargoch, became very important in the economy of the settlement. Out of a parish population in 1833 of 714, an average of 200 people were employed in procuring lead. The lead was then shipped from Rhuddlan to be smelted at Flint.

The heritage to 1750

St Ffraid's (otherwise St Bride's) church (102073) formerly had a dedication to St Cwyfan. The 13th-century building was heavily restored (and arguably largely rebuilt) by Sir George Gilbert Scott who removed, *inter alia*, the Norman west doorway. The east window is perpendicular, and an inscription of 1450 is recorded for the stained glass. Inside are a later 16th-century arch-braced roof, a decorated 11th-century standing cross formerly in the churchyard, and the cross base of another of similar date, various sepulchral slabs of late medieval date, and a medieval font that was completely retooled at the time of the Victorian restoration.

The walled churchyard (105826) has been enlarged in 1871 and it is not clear what the original size and shape would have been. However, with the polygonal enclosure that existed at the beginning of the 19th century, there are hints (though no more) of a curving boundary on the south side of the church. The topography, however, may offer a clue; the ground level immediately around the church and including the yew trees is noticeably higher than the remainder of the graveyard and this might well represent the extent of the earliest churchyard. In the churchyard are two 17th-century canopied tombs.

The holy well of Ffynnon Cwyfa (102075), the precise location of which is no longer known, is said to lie to the east of the church amongst rocks, but to have dried up.

Dyserth castle (102059/60), situated half a mile north-east of the church at the top of a steep hill, was completed by 1250, but destroyed in 1263 by Llewellyn ap Gruffydd. Quarrying has removed most of the castle site, including stone buildings, but a bank and ditch defending the

outer ward still survive to the north-east. Excavations outside the castle in 1914 yielded finds suggesting occupation here in the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Roman period.

It is not straightforward to compile a coherent story for the village, even in the post-medieval centuries. The church set on the valley floor was accompanied by some dwellings fronting onto the lane running northwards towards the coast and now known as Waterfall Road. The one recognisable higher-status building here, variously known as the Old Vicarage or Old Manor, lay beside the stream but back from the lane. Southwards the lane ran away from the church, separating from the stream, and following instead a straight course towards Rhualt and perhaps more significantly other historic settlements such as Tremeirchion and Bodfari, with just the occasional house or farm, such as Pendre. On rising ground to the east of the lane was a common and by the 19th century this was being encroached on by cottages, though to a lesser degree than the modern infilling of what is now known as Bryn-y-felin. The overall impression is one of a small core settlement by the church but with a significant number of historic houses within a kilometre or so of the church, some of which are noted below.

Opposite the church is The Old Manor (102071), a former vicarage; the building was largely restored in 1799 and now shows little evidence of its predecessor of 1584 (although a date tablet remains) which was called Plas yr Esgob and used as a residence by the Bishops of St Asaph. The house is mentioned by this name by Edward Lhuyd's respondent in 1699. The site of Dyserth vicarage ice house (103563) now lies beneath a modern housing estate.

Siamber Wen (102072), to the south of Dyserth castle, is a medieval T-plan house, built of limestone and now roofless and ruined, consisting of hall and service range and an upper-end cross wing. The solar is at the east end. The floors are thought to have been of clay. The building is said to date to the early 14th century. A well is noted in earlier accounts of the house. There is a holloway to the north-east and a platform to the south.

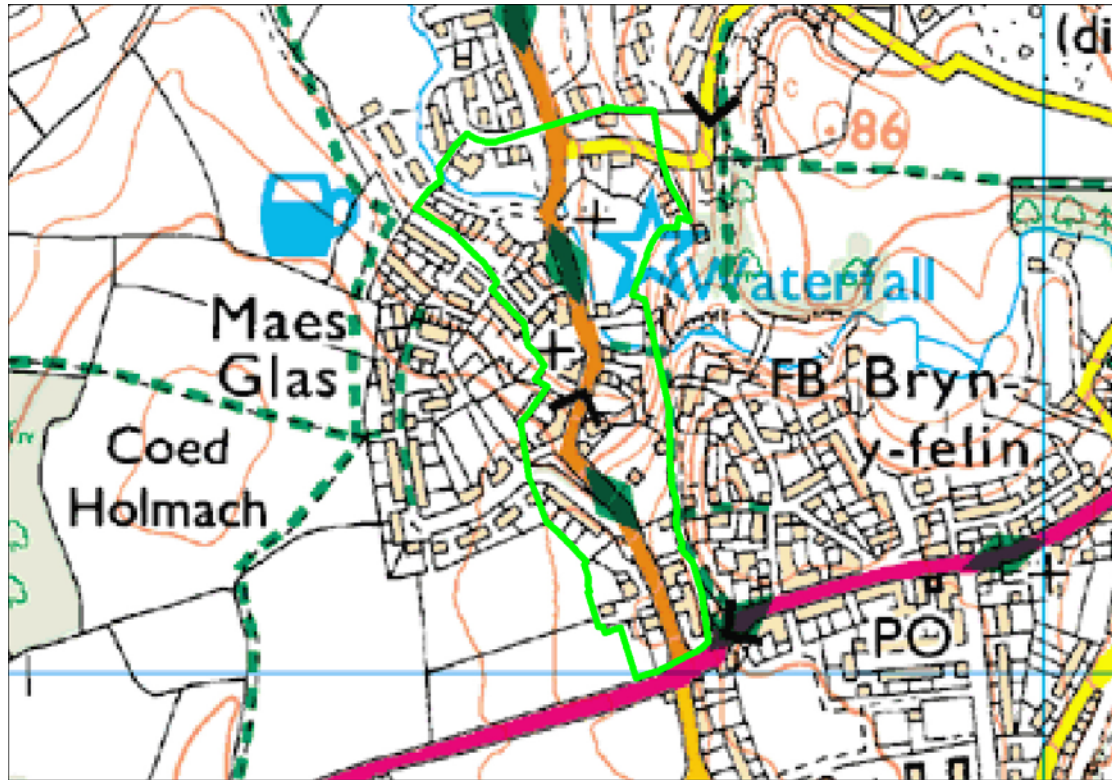
Dyserth Hall (102762) is situated just outside the village to the north of the church. Although 19th-century in appearance, it has one 16th-century mullioned window and another of the later 16th or 17th century. There is also a 17th-century stone barn here.

Llewerllyd to the north-west of the village was former 17th-century but rebuilt in 1783.

Craig-y-Castell (102070), a grade II listed building lying north-east of the village centre, is listed in Lhuyd's *Parochialia* of 1699. The two-storeyed stone-built house is possibly of early 16th-century date. The house has now been incorporated into a larger modern residence.

The lower village still contains a number of small limestone-built cottages, probably of 18th or 19th-century date, on the west side of Waterfall Road and also higher up the valley side on Maes Hyfryd. On Weavers Lane there were formerly thatched roofed cottages, but these were destroyed by fire in 1928 and have been replaced with modern houses. The upper part of Dyserth, too, contains buildings which appear to be of a similar date on Bryn y Felin and at Pendre farm (on the east side of B5119).

A mill formerly stood at the foot of the waterfall, and just back from the north to south lane through the village, some ruins still being visible there today (105827). It appears on a map from 1756 and obviously has a longer history than that. Further upstream at Pandy is the site of a fulling mill (103564), but the original buildings have been renovated and altered substantially.



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