

Whitford

SJ 1450 7820
19949

Introduction

Whitford lies on the northern side of a narrow U-shaped valley running north-eastwards towards an outlet in the Dee Estuary close to Mostyn. The church sits on the lip of the valley with the older houses extending along the contour and also a little way down the valley slope. More modern housing lies further back on the flatter terrain. The village is served by minor roads, the most important of which runs through the village north-eastwards to Holywell, 5km away.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Whitford 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 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 used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).



Whitford, photo 08-c-0213, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

Domesday Book records the presence of a church in the manor of 'Mertyn, Calcot and a third part of Widford', and this was presumably in Whitford as neither of the other named places is known to have had a medieval church. Ellis Davies commented that 'if the original founder was St Beuno, as there is some reason to believe, then the first planting of the Christian church must be assigned to the 7th century'. This could be accurate but is a difficult premise to sustain on the basis of the available evidence. It is possible too that Whitford was a mother church, but this too is not proven.

The Domesday Book entry of 1086 is the first reference to Whitford as *Widford*. The name combines 'white' with 'ford', referring in Ellis Davies' view to the ford below the village near Glanrafon where the water foamed. Subsequent names display considerable variations. In 1240 it was *Quitfordia*, in 1284 *Chwtforth* and *Chwitforth*, and eight years later *Chwytford*. *Whitford* makes a first appearance in the years between 1303 and 1305 but a decade later we find *Witteffordd*, and in 1340 *Wytford*.

Little is known of its development during the Middle Ages, but by the first half of the 18th century there were still no more than around half a dozen houses below the church, with the main axis of the village running from east to west.

The village has been enlarged in the 20th century by the addition of a small housing estate to the north of the church and a few isolated dwellings but is otherwise very much as it was in the 19th century.

The heritage to 1750

The church (102359) is now dedicated to St Mary and St Beuno, and the diocesan historian Archdeacon Thomas, at the end of the 19th century, was certain that the earlier dedication was to St Beuno. The style of the church is Perpendicular, although little architectural detail survives from this period. It has a west tower, a north aisle which is believed to be late medieval, and a nave and south aisle which were largely reconstructed in the Victorian era, together with the erection of the tower, during a restoration of 1842-46. Previously, the church had been a double-naved building. The font has a date of 1649, a chest carved from a solid block of oak which may be of pre-Reformation origin, 18th century chandeliers, and some 17th century monuments as well as that to Thomas Pennant, the antiquary who lived at Downing in the parish and who died in 1798. Additionally there is a jumble of stonework at the west end of the nave which includes a 14th or early 15th century stone coffin brought from the Bodelwyddan area, a fragment of what is probably a medieval churchyard cross (102361), discovered during the Victorian restoration, two broken piscinae which carry Romanesque-like decoration, six fragmentary 14th century sepulchral slabs, and a 17th century sundial.

There are two early medieval stones in the church. One (101603) came either from Plas yn Rhos, Caerwys and is a 'hic iacit....' stone, dating to the 6th century which was removed to Downing Hall by Thomas Pennant in 1798. Second, a cross-incised stone (102360) of the 7th-11th century was found at a depth of 2m in the churchyard in 1886.

The churchyard (17849) is rectangular with no hint of a curvilinear predecessor. It has been extended westwards since the mid-19th century, and it seems that there have been three enlargements in all: 1833, 1872 and 1926. Excavations in 1993 against the north wall revealed 14 graves of pre-16th century date. On the basis of the excavated evidence it has been suggested that the churchyard was levelled when the church was rebuilt in the early 16th century.

Two Grade II listed buildings lie to the south of the church: the stone-built Jasmine House (25044) has its origins in the 17th or perhaps the 18th century, while Ivy House (25045) is considered to be late 18th century. Less information exists for the Mostyn Arms with its earliest features said to be of the 18th century and Mount Pleasant, a reputedly much altered 17th century residence.

The plan of the village tells us little of how the village developed or of its early morphology. While the picture in the early 19th century is of a linear settlement spread along the east to west thoroughfare, the earliest buildings (as described above) cluster around the church and suggest a tight nucleation which might have its origins in the 17th century but not necessarily before.

Strip fields, presumably relics of the medieval open fields, surrounded the village. Open-field quillits in Maesy Llan lay on the south side of the stream opposite the village and still existed in relict form in the mid-19th century. Lengths of earlier trackways are visible on the north side of the village.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2009. All rights reserved. Welsh Government. Licence number 100017916.