

Berriew

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Introduction

Berriew lies between Welshpool and Newtown, about 8km south of the former, at a crossroads where the B4390 intersects the B4385. It has developed where a small river, the Afon Rhiw, leaves its valley and enters the flood plain of the Severn. The historic core of the village occupies a spur of higher ground which from the northern valley flank projects slightly into the valley itself. The southern side of the valley has generally proved too steep for building purposes. Subsequent expansion has infilled the lower ground as far as the Montgomeryshire Canal, and now the village is expanding westwards beside the Rhiw.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Berriew up to 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 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 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).



Berriew, photo 03-c-0323, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

While the traditional view that the area around Berriew was the birthplace of St Bueno has been questioned by modern scholarship, there is more conviction that land here was given to him and that he founded a church on it. This could have been towards the end of the 6th century or the beginning of the 7th century AD.

Certainly the churchyard is now far from curvilinear in its design and its oval shape has certainly been modified over the centuries by the boundary being straightened to facilitate development. In this respect it is similar to other pre-Conquest church foundations such as Corwen in Denbighshire. Even without the Bueno association, it would be identified as an early medieval foundation, and it may even be a mother church, the most important church in the district.

The earliest form of the place-name, *Eberrow*, is much later, appearing for the first time in about 1100 and is topographical referring to the mouth of Afon Rhiw. It was only in the 16th century that it lost the initial 'A' and was written down as *Beriw*.

The nature and appearance of the settlement during the medieval era is unknown, though the church had come under the control of the abbey of Strata Marcella north of Welshpool by 1254.

The Tudor period was one of general prosperity based on the wool trade and it is claimed that there was a market hall beyond the west end of the churchyard until 1875. This though needs to be confirmed for there is no corroborative evidence that Berriew was sufficiently important to warrant a market. West of Berriew was the large Vaynor Estate which had its origins late in the medieval era, and could have had some effect on the development of the village.

Even by the middle of the 19th century when the Tithe survey was drawn up the village still clustered around the church and had spread westwards only as far as The Elms and The Vicarage.

The heritage to 1750

The church (7587), dedicated inevitably to St Bueno, was built in 1803-4 and then victorianised in 1876, replacing a smaller, medieval, single-chamber building with a west bellcote. The rubble from its demolition may still be detectable as a slight mounded platform beneath the present church. Disappointingly, there are no internal fittings which pre-date the 19th century structure, except for a memorial brass of 1597.

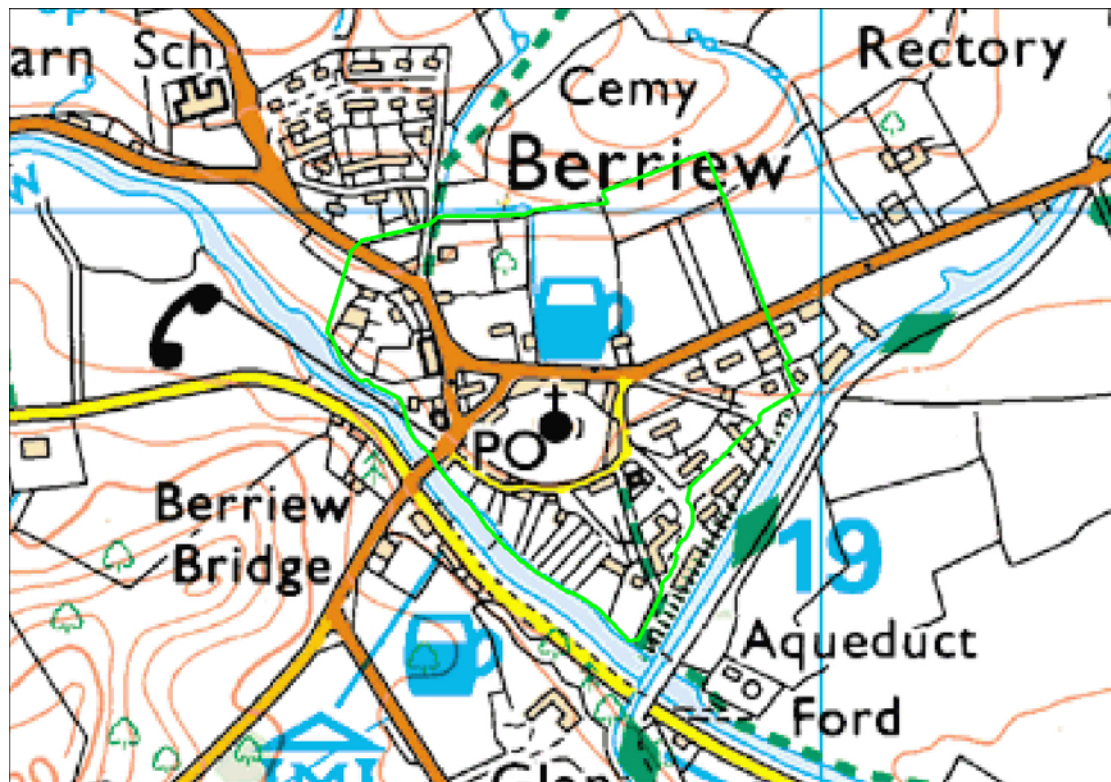
The churchyard (4583) as noted above has undergone changes to its outline, but its oval shape is still evident.

The village displays an important group of timber-framed buildings around the church. Some are of 17th and 18th century origin, but many such as Wittingham's Stores (36246) were either developed or heavily restored by the Vaynor Estate in and around the mid-19th century to create a recognisable estate pattern. The timber-framed Vicarage (31090), however, is dated to 1616. The Farmhouse (32515), another timber-framed building, is attributed to the late 17th or early 18th century. The Smithy on Church Terrace (32516) is probably late 17th century though it carries a 1774 inscription. Lychgate Cottage (20253) is of broadly the same date. The row of three houses known as The Sign (36248) may have originated as a single house in the late 17th century. Rhiew House (42354) and no 5 Church Terrace (42357) were both built in the late 17th century, as were nos 1 and 2 (25826) and nos 3 and 4 Church Terrace (42413). A free school also is known to have been established here in 1655, but was rebuilt in 1819, and is to be found on Church Terrace (42412).

Both a corn mill and a fulling mill lay near the core of the village. The latter (37454) was certainly operating as early as 1438 and shared a leat with the corn mill. In decline by the 16th century it seems to have still been operational two centuries later. Its precise location is not certain. The corn mill (8459) was of 17th century date and though it has gone the mill house remains.

Speculatively it can be suggested that the triangle formed by three lanes, just to the north-west of the churchyard, may originally have been an open space, subsequently infilled. Whether this should be seen as a village green or a small market place has yet to be determined, but regarding the latter the reader is referred back to what was written above.

Ridge and furrow cultivation (4476) of unknown date has been recognised on the north side of the B4390 opposite Laburnum House and there are other earthworks in adjacent fields to the east. A relic of earlier land divisions may also survive in the narrow strips running down to the river to the south of the church. Much more certain is that the valley floor of the Severn was widely turned over to open-field agriculture in the Middle Ages. Early maps leave no doubt that this was the case.



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