

Bettws Cedewain

SO 1227 9683

16349

Introduction

Bettws Cedewain lies on the B4389 in the hills to the west of the Severn valley, about 5km north-east of Newtown. In an area where narrow valleys are the norm, several small streams converging on the Bechan Brook, a tributary of the Severn, have created a broader bowl and it is on an adjacent spur with a shallow valley on its western edge that the church was constructed, overlooking most of the dwellings which have subsequently been constructed at lower levels in the valley. Behind the church the ground rises steeply. Similarly on the far side of the stream, gentle slopes now populated with modern houses give way to increasingly steep hillslopes. The historic centre of Bettws is well-defined, but modern estates are expanding on its periphery to the south and west.

This brief report examines Bettws's emergence and development 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 only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core provides 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).

History of development

The shape of the churchyard, the dedication of the church and its position on higher ground overlooking the sheltered Bechan Brook leave little doubt that this was an early medieval foundation, but as with almost all the churches in Montgomeryshire there is specific information to underpin the argument.

The name *Bettws* is first documented in 1254, with variants such as *Bettus* in 1365/6. *Betws Kydewain* appears in the years between 1534 and 1580. The first element is a borrowing from Old English *bed-hus* meaning an oratory, and seems to have been used primarily for a chapel in Wales. The second element reflects the cantref in which the church was situated.

Nothing of the subsequent history and development of the settlement can be established until the 18th century. In the mid-19th century, houses and a mill were cramped around the church, all of them lying to the north of the stream. Almost all of the housing was to the west of the church, while the hall occupied a privileged position to the east.

The heritage to 1750

St Bueno's church (7678) has a 19th century nave and chancel as a single chamber, appended to a west tower that is almost certainly early 16th century in date. Most of the fittings are also 19th century, but there is a fine brass of 1531, the only pre-Reformation example of its kind in Powys, commemorating the vicar Sir John ap Meredyth who built the tower. Also there are an early church chest and two bells both dated 1630.

The raised churchyard (7679) is distinctively circular, apart from on the north-west where topographical considerations dictated its form, and its outline reveals no modifications over the centuries.

The only other listed building is the Regency vicarage (7682), which was originally a timber-framed structure of the 17th or 18th century, but was burnt down and rebuilt in the 1760s and partially rebuilt again in the early 19th century. Amongst the other timber-framed houses on and just above the valley floor are the Post Office (7685) and a dwelling on Mill Street (7686) both listed as Grade III before that category became obsolete. Little is recorded about them.

The mill (8023) was last used around 1930. Built in 1850, it may have been on the site of one that is referred to in a document of 1496/7. In the mid-19th century it was supplied by a large mill pond (7683) that lay immediately to the west of the churchyard and was fed by a small stream running off the hills.

There is little to suggest that the village was ever any larger than it was in the middle of the 19th century, but a single earthwork platform (7680) was noted adjacent to the road running eastwards towards Welshpool.

The former course of the road from the south, prior to the works of the local turnpike trust, can be seen as a terraced track (7687).

Possible ridge and furrow cultivation has been noted at two places on the south-facing hillside near the church (7681; 7684). As with much of the ridge and furrow in Montgomeryshire, its date cannot be determined with any degree of precision.



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