

Carno

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Introduction

Carno straddles the main arterial A470 between the Montgomeryshire towns of Newtown and Machynlleth, about 16km north-west of the former. It is a settlement of several parts, and had it been like this at the beginning of the medieval era we would undoubtedly be terming it polyfocal. The old village and church sit on the south side of Afon Carno, raised above the valley floor on a gravel terrace. A stream, Afon Cerniog, flowing eastwards to join the main river, creates a wedge of land on which the village was established. A couple of hundred metres up the road towards Machynlleth is another focus that has grown up around a former mill and a house that functioned as a country club. Further out still at the western extremity is what was the Laura Ashley complex, more than a kilometre from the historic centre. New housing is gradually making its mark on the historic part of Carno, and ultimately we may wonder whether the village will become a single unbroken ribbon development along the main road.

This brief report examines Carno'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 position of Carno church beside a river might suggest an early medieval origin but other characteristic traits such as a curvilinear churchyard are missing, and the dedication reveals only the influence of the Hospitallers. Whether there was an earlier dedicatee, one of the saints or holy men, is unknown.

In the late 12th or early 13th century the manor of Carno came into the possession of the Knights Hospitallers, and became a holding or out-station of their border estate of Halston in Shropshire. The earthwork enclosure adjacent to the church and known as Caer Noddfa has been associated with them.

Current thinking derives the village name from the river which was documented as *Nant Carno* in the years between 1143 and 1151. The name may indicate that the river flowed from or through an area of cairns. The earliest reference to Carno is earlier, for a battle occurred here in 950 and was mentioned in annals about 1100. The reference should not, however, be taken to signify a settlement or church – it could simply have referred to a general topographical location.

Its subsequent development is not recorded. Carno, it has been suggested, was a place of pilgrimage, but even if this is true (and the evidence is not persuasive) this could have had little influence on the scale of settlement. By the early 19th century when the first map appeared, buildings surrounded the churchyard on three sides and a small group clustered together on the south bank of the Cerniog in Frankwell.

The heritage to 1750

The present church of St John the Baptist (7619) was erected in 1863, replacing an earlier building. The mounded platform around the west end of the church probably indicates its rubble. The only fittings that were preserved from the earlier church were three bells cast in the second half of the 17th century.

Inside the church is a cross-inscribed pillar stone (918; SAM Mont146) attributed to the 7th-8th century which was found acting as a gate-post near the Laura Ashley factory in 1960. Its original location is not known: it could have been a marker or perhaps may have been erected in an early medieval cemetery.

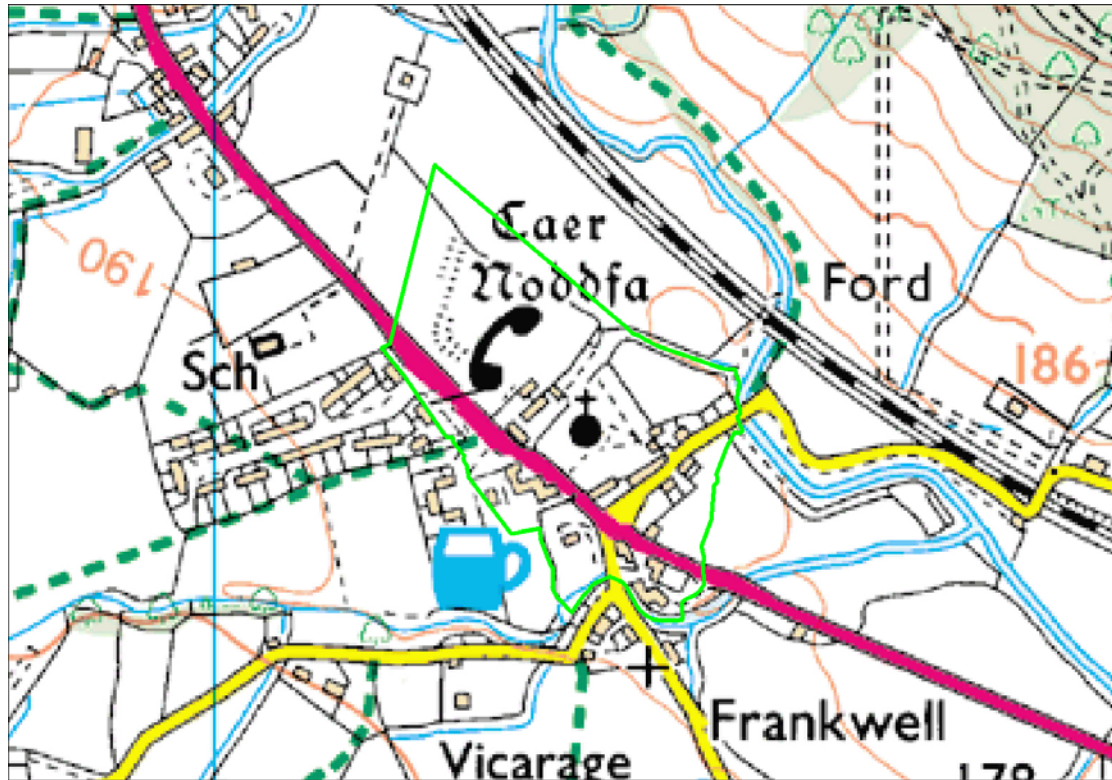
The churchyard is sharply rectangular in its form, giving no hint as to when it was first laid out.

The rectilinear enclosure known as Caer Noddfa (919; SAM Mont052) beside the church is generally thought to have been used as a *hospitium* (grange) by the Knights Hospitaller, and the name has some antiquity for it was referred to be Edward Lhuyd's correspondent in the 1690s. Whether the earthwork is in fact a military installation of Roman date has yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Excavations in 1964/5 produced only the stone foundations of a building of medieval date.

Although many of the buildings existing in the village appear to be depicted on an 1802 manuscript map, none has been considered sufficiently important to warrant listing, and there are no records of any significantly earlier buildings in the village core.

The layout of the village prior to the improvements of the 18th century turnpike trust which forced through the main road invites speculation. Possibly the main thoroughfare was along Post Office Lane on the north-south axis of the bridges (or fords) across the two rivers.

Ridge and furrow cultivation (7620) overlies Caer Noddfa, its date unknown.



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