

Cemmaes

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15642

Introduction

Cemmaes lies in the valley of the Dovey, about 11km north-east of Machynlleth, and on the A470 trunk road linking Newtown and Dolgellau. The village has grown up just to the north of where a small stream, Nant Coegen, enters the Dovey, but on a river terrace well above the valley floor. A very steep scarp drops down from the churchyard edge to the river which here runs close to the eastern edge of the valley. The village is compact with all past development occurring south of the church. This has resulted in fairly complete street frontage development as far as Pont y Cemmaes. The most recent housing has extended the village on to the further side of the stream.

This brief report examines Cemmaes'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 distinctively curvilinear churchyard and the British dedication to a local saint favour an early medieval foundation for the church,

The name is said to derive from *camas* with a plural form *cemais* meaning 'river-bends'. The earliest form of the name, *Kemeys*, was recorded in 1254 in relation to the church. *Cemmaes* made a first appearance in 1836.

Virtually nothing is known of the development of the settlement at Cemmaes, nor indeed whether there was a settlement here in the Middle Ages. As late as 1842, the church was accompanied by perhaps no more than eight houses, while the earliest map to show a part of the village – an estate plan from 1774 – depicts three houses, though others must have existed. Samuel Lewis in 1833 recorded that three annual fairs were held here, implying that it might have been a manorial centre.

History of development

St Tydecho's church (31087) is a single-chamber edifice with a west bellcote, perhaps datable to the 14th or 15th century, and a porch added in the 18th century. All the windows were replaced in the 19th century and the interior was restored at the beginning of the 20th century. It retains its 15th century arch-braced roof, but apart from a fragment of a 15th century screen and several 18th century wall memorials, none of the internal fittings survived the restorations.

The churchyard (7672) holds a distinctively semi-circular shape as a result of its location on the edge of the river terrace. Unlike many churchyards, its plan does not appear to have been modified at any time since it was laid out, other than perhaps a little encroachment by buildings on its western side.

A putative holy well - Ffynnon Tydecho (118305) - has recently been claimed below the churchyard near the base of the valley scarp. There is, it has to be said, no historical documentation for classing this as a holy well, but a stone-faced basin is still in evidence.

Several houses in the village have 18th century features including a sub-medieval rear-wing at Glan-afon (40315) which could perhaps be even earlier, a back kitchen at Gorffwysfa (7673) and parts of Brithonfa (40093), but it seems that no complete building from an earlier century has survived.



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