

Guilfield

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Introduction

Guilfield lies on the B4392, 4km to the north of Welshpool. The village occupies flat ground on the south side of the Guilfield Brook, a stream which meanders its way along an increasingly broad plain towards the Severn. The church was established where the valley begins to narrow and where the stream has created a visible cutting, and where a ridge of higher ground overlooks the gentle terrain below. Guilfield has expanded enormously since the Second World War, with new housing developments spreading out on three sides from the historic centre.

This brief report examines Guilfield'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 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).



Guilfield, photo 95-c-0038, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

The dedication of the church and the shape of the churchyard point to an early medieval foundation here. St Aelhaearn was reputedly a follower of St Bueno, a Powysian saint with links to the Berriew area.

The traditional interpretation of Guilsfield, supported by the compilers of the most recent authoritative text on place-names in Wales, is that the name signifies 'Gyldi's field', appearing first as *Guildesfelde* in 1278. The Welsh equivalent is Cegidfa, which as *Kegitua* is earlier, in the 12th century, and also is the name given in the Norwich Taxation of 1254. *Cegid* is hemlock and *fa* is place, but other interpretations have been put on this name.

The development of the settlement through the medieval era is, like so many others, obscure, and any attempt to picture the full pattern of housing before the Georgian period, can be no more than guesswork. However, the survival of one or two houses pre-dating the 17th century (see below) reveals that the settlement was already spreading down some of the lanes that converged on the churchyard, emphasising a growing nucleation. It was in the 18th century that the road through the village received the attention of a turnpike trust and by the middle of the following century, houses clustered around the church and on the north and south sides of the block of land to the west of the churchyard.

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Aelhaiarn (5769; not St Giles, an error on the part of the 18th century antiquary, Thomas Pennant) has a complicated history: a nave of the 14th century, an added west tower, perhaps by 1400, a porch and south aisle of the 15th century, and a north aisle a little later. It has one of the richest medieval church interiors in the county, with an early font and late medieval and Tudor-era roofs.

The churchyard (7675) is effectively rectangular with rounded corners, raised above the surrounding street level. It shows no signs of having been modified during its long history.

For its size, Guilsfield has one of the largest number of listed buildings in Montgomeryshire. White Ash (30798) has been dated to 1521 though remodelled in the 18th century, The Square (30790) is considered to be 16th or early 17th century, and Belan Cottage (30769) is said to have been dated to 1542. Bod-Isa Cottage has late 16th century origins. Then, there are a number of buildings dated from the 17th century, most of them listed, including the timber-framed Yew Tree (30799), Bod-isa (30770), Abercrombie House (30787) and the adjacent Trawscoed Cottage (30791), the King's Head (58383) and the much-altered, timber-framed Oak Inn (30783)

The picture that emerges of Guilsfield is of a well-established small village by the end of the Tudor period, and this could be taken as an indicator that there was already a nucleated settlement here in the late medieval era, although that has yet to be demonstrated.

The pattern of settlement as depicted on the Tithe map and on the earlier but less precise enclosure map suggests that originally two tracks departed the lane girdling the churchyard. One was the predecessor of the present B4392 and it is possible that in the vicinity of The Square and the now levelled Garden Cottage the lane broadened out into an open triangular area, though it would be premature to class this as a green. The other track curved round northwards to cross the Guilsfield Brook by a ford which is still functioning and up to Caefelin Wood, a modern footpath continuing into the hills to the north where originally the track led to Trawscoed-hen. A lane coming in from the direction of Groes-lwyd to the west is indicated by the positions of Belan Cottage and The Square. For all its modern growth,

Guilsfield has witnessed only very limited archaeological activity, a single watching brief off Oak Lane in 1995 failing to find any trace of medieval activity.

A D-shaped moated enclosure (94), its ditch partly infilled, lies to the south of the village. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, this should be viewed as a medieval manorial centre, the home of the local lord.

Traces of ridge and furrow cultivation (7676), between the moat and the village, are visible on aerial photography but have not been verified and could be quite recent in origin. No indications of medieval open-field agriculture have yet been recognised.



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