

Aberedw

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16113

Introduction

Aberedw as its name implies lies where the River Edw debouches into the Wye on its eastern side, some 5km to the south-east of Builth Wells. The valley of this tributary is perceptibly broad at its mouth but narrows as it cuts into the hills to the east and the settlement has developed where the valley opens out. A secondary road, the B4567, running down the Wye valley, passes immediately to the west of the settlement.

This brief report examines its 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).



Aberedw village, photo 95-C-0349 © CPAT, 2011

History of development

The name meaning simply 'mouth of the (river) Edw' appears first in 1291 as *Aberedo* and as *Aberedwy* in 1375. The castle was termed *Aberhedon Castel* in the period 1536 to 1539.

The origins of this settlement are not known. St Cewydd is an obscure saint or holy man, said to have lived in the 6th century, who has two other churches dedicated to him in the region. Legend has it that his hermitage was the rock shelter, now known as Llywelyn's cave, on the other side of the river. The curvilinear churchyard should reinforce the early medieval (i.e. pre-Norman Conquest) attribution, but does not mean that a settlement grew up around the church at this time.

The strategic value of the location was recognised in the 12th century when a motte (though without an obvious bailey) was thrown up on the north bank of the Edw, 200m or so to the south-west of the church. This was succeeded by a stone castle set on the edge of the river terrace above the Wye, 400m to the west of the church; this was the final stronghold of Llewelyn ap Gruffydd before his death nearby in 1282.

Whether a village developed here at the time can only be a matter of speculation. The key potential foci – the church and the two castles – are quite widely spaced and there are no ancient buildings in the village itself. The layout of the village in the mid-19th century was somewhat different from today with its recent growth along the by-road that leads from the church to the B4567. In the mid 19th century, dwelling lay immediately to the west, east and north of the churchyard, with more to the east than the west. That to the north was known as White Hall (today termed White House) and it may have been of a slightly higher status than the other dwellings. Overall this suggests a small nucleation but whether this existed at the beginning of the 18th century is not known, and only a single watching brief has as yet been conducted in the village.

The heritage to 1750

Church and motte occupy sites that are located above the precipitous drop to the river, the latter on a detached and defensible ridge of rock. Aberdew Castle on the other hand has a strategic though less defensive position overlooking the Wye.

St Cewydd's Church (16002; Grade II listed) consists of a nave, perhaps of the 14th century, a chancel (of the 16th century), a north porch (of the 15th century) and west tower. The tower may have been rebuilt during the 16th century, and some restoration occurred in c.1888. A Perpendicular screen and some late 18th-century monuments are housed within it and an interesting range of tombstones is set into the chancel wall externally. Its churchyard (16231) is broadly curvilinear, except on its south side which gives the appearance of a later extension.

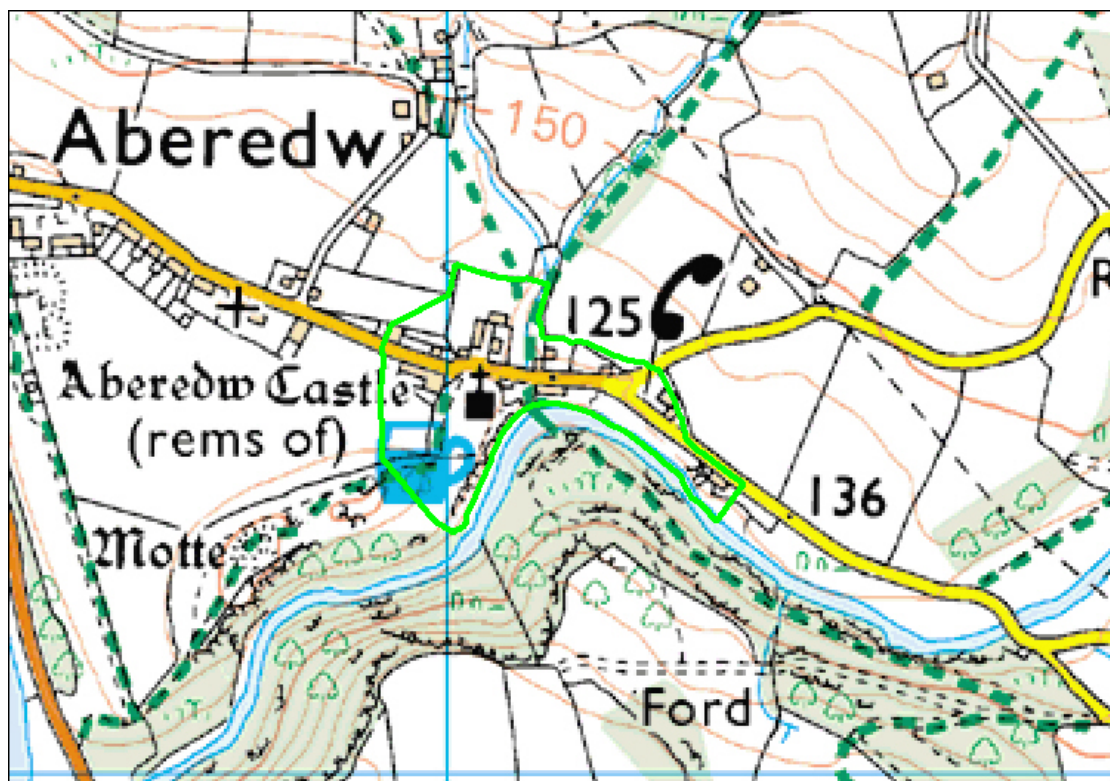
The earthwork motte, known as Hen Castell (944; SAM Rd117) is 30m in diameter and over 5m high; it has a ditch and counterscarp bank on the north and west and was formerly surmounted by a D-shaped stone tower, the grass-covered foundations of which are still apparent. The date of its occupation has yet to be established, though it has been suggested that it could have been thrown up at the end of the 11th century and perhaps destroyed in the middle of the following one. No trace of a bailey can be discerned but the ground immediately to the east is flat and could have been utilised for such an enclosure.

Aberedw Castle (945; SAM Rd029) consists of a small rectangular earthwork, attributed to the late 13th century. Its west side was destroyed during the construction of the Cambrian railway in the 19th century. A moat is visible on the other three sides, a curtain wall on the

north and east with towers at the north-east and south-east and an entrance on the east. The stone element of the castle probably dates from around the end of the 13th century for Walter Hakelutel had received a licence to crenellate by 1284/5 and it may be that the whole castle dates from this time, although this would have implications for the location of Llewelyn's putative stronghold. Suggestions that there might have been an associated hunting park and that the motte could have functioned as a viewing platform have yet to be proved.

South of the castle are the ruined abutments of Pont Shirni (1597) which bridged the Edw. It has been suggested, though without any foundation, that this may have been contemporary with Aberedw Castle.

The village for the most lies in a dry U-shaped valley between the church on the east and the castle to the west. The church apart there are no listed buildings and seemingly none of any great age within the built-up area. Nor have any earthworks suggestive of shrunken settlement been observed.



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