

Norton

SO 304672
16184

Introduction

The village of Norton surmounts the western lip of a valley occupied by Norton Brook, the highest ground with the steepest drop to the north being utilised by the castle, the lower ground to the south by the ostensibly more modern parts of the settlement. The B4355 from Knighton runs through the village to Presteigne 3km to the south-east.

This brief report examines Norton'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).



Norton village, photo 04-C-0138, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

Norton is one of those rare places in Wales that has an entry in Domesday Book (1086). There it was termed *Nortune* meaning 'North Farm'.

Subsequently it developed as a nucleated settlement to the east of Offa's Dyke, and though the origin of the settlement is not documented it has the landscape appearance of a planned settlement with a regular street layout, one that was deliberately laid out rather than growing organically and haphazardly

Samuel Lewis in the first half of the 19th century records that 'the inhabitants call this place a borough, and style themselves burgesses; but nothing satisfactory is recorded either of the time or the manner in which they obtained their priveleges, which are but few and very obscurely defined: they are empowered to hold a court every two or three years..'. Nevertheless, Beresford has pointed out that in the past 'a separate jury was sworn for Norton, a distinction usually reserved for castle-towns and boroughs'. Curiously, a field in the village was termed 'Burgess' in the mid-19th century. These statements reinforce the view that it was a deliberate plantation.

Around the settlement, a classic open-field system developed in the Middle Ages, with three or four fields divided into furlongs. Chessell Field retained its name into the 19th century. South and south-east of the village, particularly around Orchard House (then called Corns) quilllets were still in evidence in the mid-19th century together with the mere or boundary stones that demarcated the strips.

The village at the time of the mid-19th century Tithe survey appeared as a sizeable community, and there has been some expansion to south and west since that time.

The heritage to 1750

Norton Castle (308; SAM Rd056) consists of a 5m-high motte with ditch, and outer bank on the south. Defensive earthworks seem to form a roughly rectangular bailey between the motte and Norton Brook, enclosing the church as well. It is, however, difficult to determine the extent to which the scarp bank of the bailey as depicted on the modern Ordnance Survey map is a natural landform, not least because of later landscaping. A low bank in the south-east angle of the churchyard could be a relic of the bailey defences. A castle was recorded here in 1191, and was taken by the Welsh in 1262. Leland in the mid-16th century recorded 'a litle pilet or turret', presumably on the top of the motte.

St Andrew's church (30418; Grade II) has a 17th-century timber bell-turret, but the body of the building was largely replaced in 1868. A Norman-style doorway leads from the porch to the nave, and may perhaps signal what was here previously. The 19th-century screen incorporates older wood from its 16th-century predecessor and there is a 15th-century font.

The churchyard (16310) is sub-rectangular and raised, particularly on the south side.

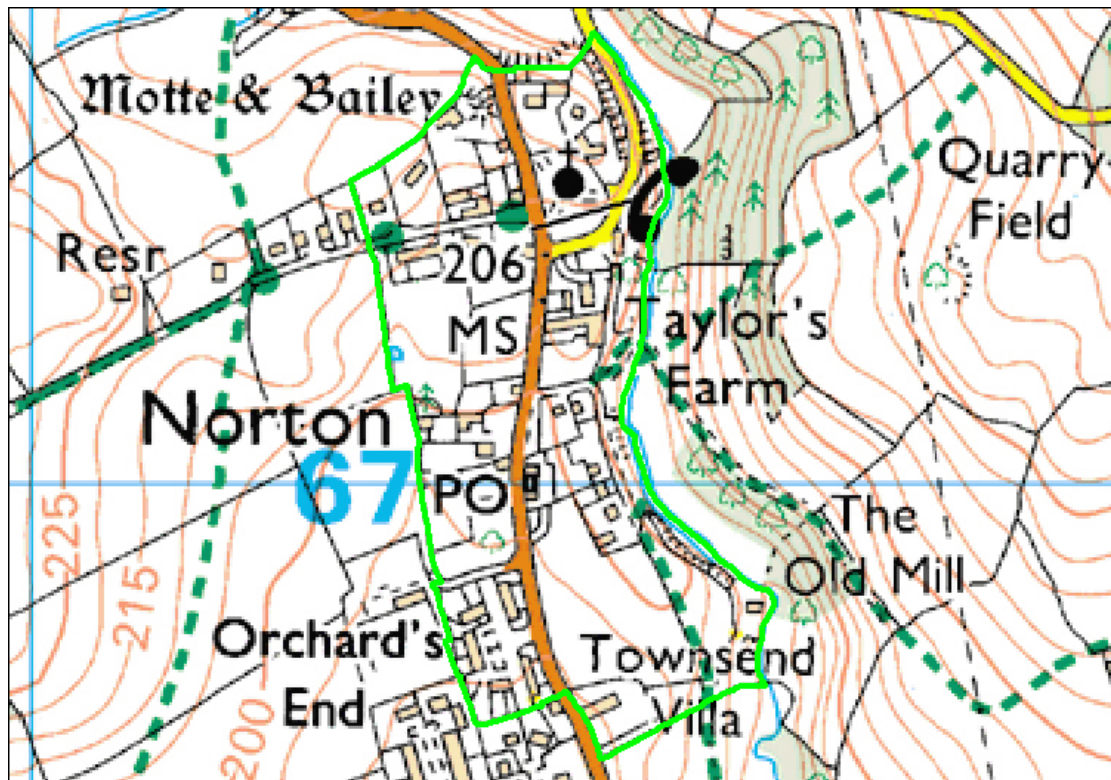
Norton Post Office (30412) is in part a late medieval, cruck-framed gentry hall-house, though rebuilt two hundred years ago, while The Forge (30417) beside the churchyard has 17th-century origins. Both are Grade II listed. Church House is a much altered 17th- or 18th-century cottage, while a stone-built range at Corte Farm is considered to be of 17th-century origin. Norton Mill (30414), mechanically complete, dates from the early 19th century, but what is not clear is whether this is in the same location as the fulling mill (23004) which is documented as early as the 14th century.

The road pattern as indicated above is reminiscent of a deliberately planned layout. This might hold true for all the ground on either side of the B4355, lying to the north of the modern Milbank Estate. The systematic pattern of the lanes and also the fact that there appear to be 'back' lanes on both sides of the main road can both be taken as pointers.

Earthworks of uncertain character could be seen in a large field on the east side of the main road, though some of this has now been developed (16311; OS plot 4989).

Results from recent evaluations have been mixed. Evaluations at Taylor's Farm, immediately south of the churchyard were negative but did not assess the street frontage; the earthworks further south, referenced in the paragraph above, appear to have been confirmed as the positions of medieval dwellings from the evidence of both a watching brief and evaluation.

Ridge and furrow survives in faint form (16272) just to the south of Mynd Road, and there are other earthwork traces in the same field. Few if any of the strip fields that survived in the mid-19th century, remain today. The only legacy is the pattern of large rectangular fields beside the road to Presteigne, and also what appear to earthwork baulks in fields between the village and Norton Manor.



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