

Erbistock

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Introduction

The modern settlement of Erbistock is located in a loop of the River Dee on its northern bank, less than 2km west of Overton. The village is reached by a minor lane road leading south of the A539 that links Whitchurch with Llangollen, and terminates at the river. The small settlement lies towards the foot of a steep slope which rises sharply from the river terrace, with the church and inn immediately above the river and the few houses straggling up the hill behind the church and on to the more level plateau beyond.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Erbistock up to 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to consult other sources of information and particularly with regard to the origins and nature of the later buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered solely 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 adopted in the HER to provide researchers with information that is specific to the individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

Erbistock is derived from Old English terms meaning ‘Erp’s place’, though the element *stoc* can also carry the more specific meaning of a dairy farm or even a secondary or outlying settlement, i.e. one that was an offshoot of an already established settlement. It was first recorded in Domesday Book in 1086 as *Erpestoch*, and by 1291 was referred to as *Erbystok*, very similar to the modern form. It has been suggested that if it was a secondary establishment the home could have been at Eyton.

Virtually nothing is known of the early history of Erbistock. The circumstances that led to the original settlement at this location are unclear: the proximity of a ford across the River Dee, and good agricultural land to the north and east are likely factors, but it is a moot question as to whether it was the ford or the church that came first. The setting of the church close to the river bank but in a relatively secluded position is typical of a sizeable number of early medieval church sites in Wales. There is, though, no direct evidence for a pre-Conquest church on this spot and the tradition that the church was formerly dedicated to an obscure and probably early saint, Erbin, would be unconvincing, but for the fact that ‘ye offrying of Saynt Erbyns’ were referred to amongst the income of the church at the time of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in 1535. With this can be coupled the fact that the parish was carved out of a larger landholding belonging to the clas church at Bangor-on-Dee, and that Erbistock will originally have been a chapel dependant on the mother church, a situation more likely to have

occurred in the pre-Conquest era. Thus the establishment of a church, probably an early one, is another factor that might be considered as a potential stimulus for settlement.

It is the mid-19th-century tithe map that provides indirect evidence of a small, perhaps nucleated, community at Erbistock in the Middle Ages. Open fields lay immediately to the north of the church, to the north-east, and perhaps to the east where the grounds of the rectory seem to have supplanted an earlier field pattern. Open field strips imply the presence of several farmers whose lands were interspersed with those of their neighbours, and the proximity of the fields to the church suggests that their dwellings were close by. It is likely then that there were more houses along the lane leading down to the church than there are today and this represented the nucleated or semi-nucleated community of Erbistock.

By 1770 the dwellings had thinned out, for an estate map of that date shows a similar pattern of settlement to the present day with the small cluster of buildings around the church on the riverside and a few dispersed farm buildings and cottages to the north. During the 17th and 18th centuries the large residences at Manley Hall and Erbistock Hall were founded by wealthy families moving into the area.

The heritage to 1750

The church (102684), dedicated to St Hilary, was entirely rebuilt in the standard Gothic style in 1860, the only survivals from an earlier age being the Romanesque font, a chandelier that is likely to be 18th-century, and several wall memorials. The dates of its predecessors have not been established, but there was a church here in 1692 which was at least partially constructed in timber, and a stone church in 1748 which seems to have been a Georgian building that was claimed as a ‘neat modern edifice in the Grecian style of architecture’ by Samuel Lewis in 1833. A painting, presumably 18th century, depicts a double-aisled nave with a bellcote, a south porch and a window to illuminate a west gallery; the interior, not surprisingly had box pews according to contemporary pencil sketches.

The modern churchyard is rectilinear, almost rectangular, but there are hints in the alignment of its northern boundary of a smaller and perhaps more curvilinear enclosure in earlier times.

Excluding the church, two buildings are of historic interest. The Boat Inn (105318) situated just to the west of the church is claimed as 16th-century in date but the surviving structure is wholly of 17th-, 19th- and 20th-century construction. Originally two buildings now converted to one, it takes its name from a former ferry across the Dee. Portions of the Old Rectory (Grade II) can be dated to the late 17th or early 18th century, though most of the building is late 18th-century. Elsewhere in the parish, Grove Farm, Manley Hall, Erbistock Hall and, on the far side of the river, Llan-y-cefn are all 18th-century and earlier.

No features of archaeological interest were noted during the survey that was conducted as part of the original field assessment in 1992. It must be assumed that any archaeological deposits relating to the putative medieval settlement lie beneath, or in the immediate vicinity of, the present buildings.

The tithe map shows that the fields edging the settlement on the north consisted largely of a former open field system made up of the characteristic elongated strips, sometimes termed quilllets. Palmer in 1910 noted that three closes were called ‘the village fields’. Residual elements of these quilllets still survive to the east of Glebe Cottage, but there are no indications of the ridge and furrow that are so much a feature of Wrexham Maelor.



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