

Gresford

15666
SJ 3464 5498

Introduction

The modern village of Gresford village lies a short distance to the north-west of the former A483 trunk road, now the B5445, that linked Wrexham to Chester and has now been superseded by the Wrexham bypass. Llay lies two kilometres to the west, Wrexham 5km to the south, and the village itself has merged with Pant and Marford into a continuous built-up area on the east side of the River Alyn. The historic core of Gresford lies on the lip of ground that drops steeply down into the river valley to the north, while to the south it falls gently away from the crest occupied by the church.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Gresford up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the village, it may be necessary to examine other sources of information and particularly for the origins and nature of some of the 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

With the simple meaning of 'grass ford', Gresford appears as *Gretford* in 1086 and in its present form in 1273. The ford has been interpreted as a crossing of the Alyn (Alun), probably a predecessor of the bridge that lies below and immediately west of the church, and the assumption is that the road or track approaching the ford was a grassy one.

The manor of Gresford was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 with a church and a priest, and enough villeins and smallholders to at least hint at the possibility of a nucleated community. Palmer, the accomplished early 20th-century historian of Wrexham, saw Gresford as part of the larger medieval manor of Burton. Where the church was located and the villeins resided is not clear, but the former, it has been argued, was not the present building which was built on land given by a local landowner at the end of the 12th century, but the chapel of St Leonard at Pont y Capel on the River Alyn south of Llay (SJ 336 541). This seems to have continued in use into the 16th century and may still have been a ruin at the time that Lhuyd undertook his parochial survey in c.1699.

Gresford church, relatively newly built, has a rectorial list that goes back to 1284 and by 1291 it was worth £24, a value that would not have disgraced churches with a much longer history. It is a reasonable assumption that as the medieval era progressed, the church became a focus for settlement, though unfortunately this can be no more than speculation. However, by the

end of the 17th century, it had undoubtedly developed into a recognisable nucleation for Lhuyd referred to twenty houses around the church.

An estate map of 1787 provides the first visual impression of the settlement with dwellings concentrated around all sides of the rectangular churchyard and spreading south-eastwards along High Street, a pattern that had altered little by the middle of the 19th century. The streets around the church were noticeably wide and a small open area of ground or common land lay to the north-west of the churchyard. Palmer termed this the green and remarked that the village stocks were placed on it. The only other point of interest is the growth of the settlement, not along the road that ran to Wrexham which would have been the most obvious direction, but along High Street, a road that led to the subsidiary settlement of Holt.

The distribution of settlement above is reinforced on the 1870-1 OS map though with slightly more expansion to the south and east. The churchyard had been extended to the south sometime between 1843 and 1870, an extension that resulted in the demolition of two dwellings depicted on both the 1843 Tithe and 1787 estate maps. The other curious protrusion in the churchyard layout – in the north-west corner – resulted from a similar intake of land from the common, apparently in 1831.

The heritage to 1750

All Saints' church (PRN 100383) has been described as 'the perfect Cheshire church in Wales' and is without doubt one of the ecclesiastical glories of Wales. It incorporates a nave with side aisles, a chancel and a west tower, and there are a wealth of internal fittings and features and external carvings. It is largely 15th-century Perpendicular in its style and fabric with traces of earlier and later features including a 16th-century south porch. The churchyard was formerly rectangular but incorporates 19th-century extensions on the north and south; there is nothing to suggest an original curvilinear graveyard that might an early medieval foundation.

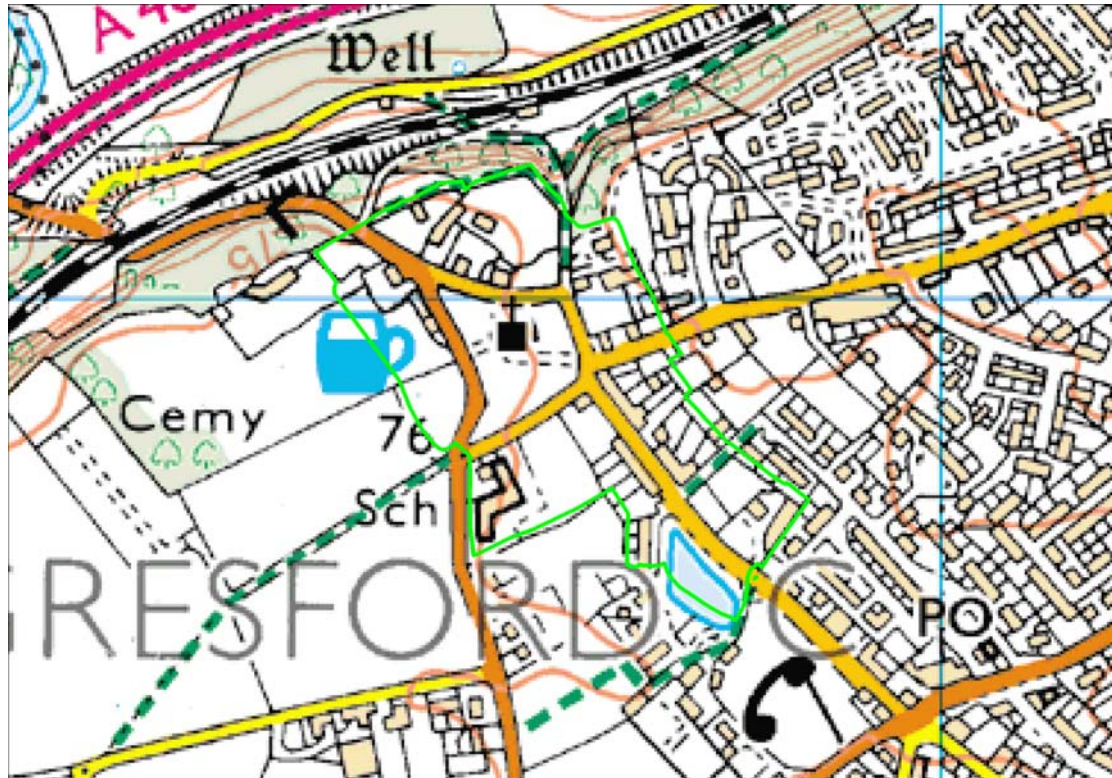


Gresford, photo 86-c-0087 © CPAT, 2013

Strode House (105330) on the northern side of the churchyard is a Grade II listed building, the former school accompanied by almshouses and both being built in 1725. Elsewhere the

buildings of Gresford are of predominantly 19th-century date, and overall the village seems poorly represented by historic buildings.

At a greater distance from the historic core around the church are a former holy well known as All Saints Well (100357) which is in the lower slope of the Alyn valley immediately to the north of the churchyard, and a medieval cross base (100379) positioned at the junction of the B5373 and the B5445, its former cross perhaps marking the limit of some ecclesiastical jurisdiction or having some less well-defined secular purpose.



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