

Ruabon

SJ 3027 4379
15695

Introduction

The village of Ruabon occupies the top of a hill and its slopes to the south-west. A number of main roads converge on the centre of the village near the church. The industrial settlements of Rhosllanerchrugog and Acrefair are located to the north-west and south-west. Wrexham lies about 7km to the north-east.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Ruabon up to 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to examine other sources of information and particularly regarding the origins and nature 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

Ruabon was established between the two great Anglo-Saxon dykes: Offa's Dyke runs approximately 600m to the west, Wat's Dyke less than one kilometre to the east.

The earliest form of the place-name is *Rywnabon* which appeared in 1291, with *Riwuabon* in 1362. Referring to an otherwise unattested individual, the name commemorates 'Mabon's hill'. It has been suggested that Mabon was a saint, and that the first church here was dedicated to him. While it is likely that the church's dedication to the Virgin (see below) is not the original one, probably occurring when the Cistercians of Valle Crucis acquired much of the parish in 1274, the attribution to Mabon is, on present evidence, more a tradition than a fact. Indeed, in the 1254 Taxatio the entry to *Ecclesia Sancti Colyeni* [St Collen] is normally linked to Ruabon.

In the medieval period it can be assumed that the earliest settlement might have clustered around the church at the top of Bridge Street. Possibly there was a small community here by the 13th century, when the church is mentioned in the Pope Nicholas' Taxatio in 1291, though this has yet to be confirmed. But the site of the church is almost certainly much earlier. The near circular churchyard which formerly extended to the west down Ysgoldy Hill suggests that there was an early medieval *llan* church, perhaps preceded by an enclosed cemetery here, before the Norman Conquest.

The economy of the medieval settlement may have integrated ironworking and coal mining but agriculture and farming generally would have been the primary concern with the

utilisation of the lower land to the east. In contrast to more recent centuries, medieval Ruabon is very poorly documented, and it is not yet possible to define the extent or nature of the medieval village here. However, the presence of *Maes-y-llan* immediately to the east of the village coupled with surviving records including a fine estate map of 1715, points to medieval open-field agriculture which in this region would almost certainly be associated with a nucleated settlement.

Ruabon undoubtedly continued to expand in the Tudor period, and in the early 17th century a grammar school was established close to the church, later moving to the outskirts of the village, while 17th-century church terriers reveal buildings around the church. By the mid-19th century, a compact, almost rectangular shaped, settlement was in existence around the church. A western extension crossed Afon Eitha where a mill is recorded at Plas Newydd. The eastern end of the village was incorporated within the Wynnstay Estate and indeed Samuel Lewis in the 1830s claimed that the prosperity of Ruabon was due to the proximity of Wynnstay as well as the neighbourhood ironstone and coal mines. Park Street effectively became a small square with cottages of c.1840 on either side of the road. The listed Ruabon Gateway into Wynnstay Park was at the eastern extreme of the square while at the western end lay the Wynnstay Arms Hotel. A station was built in 1848.

A well-developed brick-making industry expanded along with the collieries in the 19th century, the former surviving well into the 20th century. Modern expansion has extended the 19th-century core to the north along High Street and west along the B5605 beyond Station Road. Finally, a recommendation, the best modern history of Ruabon is T. W. Pritchard's *Remembering Ruabon* which was published in Millennium year.



Ruabon Church of St Mary, photo 95-c-0044 © CPAT, 2013

The heritage to 1750

The 14th-century church of St Mary (101340), heavily restored in c.1871, has a low west tower, nave and chancel and aisles. Internal features include a 15th-century wall painting depicting the Seven Works of Mercy, a sepulchral slab and several 14th-century effigies, 18th-

century monuments to the Wynn family and the royal arms painted on a wooden board in 1780.

The churchyard has been largely cleared of monuments with grass and parking areas prevailing. Its outline has been modified over time, but not sufficiently to disguise its former sub-oval shape, and this appears to be a rare *llan* survival in Wrexham Maelor. Perhaps it originally encompassed all of the ground up to Ysgoldy Lane on the west and Bridge Street on the south. A new graveyard, opened at the west end of Church Street, is also presently disused.

There are a number of listed buildings in Ruabon. Most of the pre-19th century structures are Grade II, although Plas Newydd (101205) in Pont Adam Crescent on the opposite side of the river to the church is and a mid-16th-century H-plan mansion is Grade II*. The others are the Old Grammar School (105331) from 1618 which may incorporate parts of an even earlier building, but is now disguised behind a 19th-century shop front, the almshouses (105335) in Church Street that are said to have been built in 1711, the Bridge End hotel which is thought to have an 18th-century if not earlier origin, and a range of later post-medieval structures that include the Round House, the parish lock-up (105332), adjoining the church wall on the north side of Bridge Street, which is later 18th century, as is the Wynnstay Arms Hotel (105335) in Park Street.

Unlisted and unverified but potentially of architectural/historic importance are several other buildings: a number of houses along Church Street display timber-framing behind 18th or 19th-century facades and could possibly be of 17th-century or earlier origin; several houses on the west side of Duke Street (105337) also display timber-framing which may indicate an older construction than their facades would suggest; and the building known as Brookside House (105338) situated on the south side of Afon Eitha below Bridge Street has walls that appear to be part timber-framed - its situation might suggest that this has formerly been a mill.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2013. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.