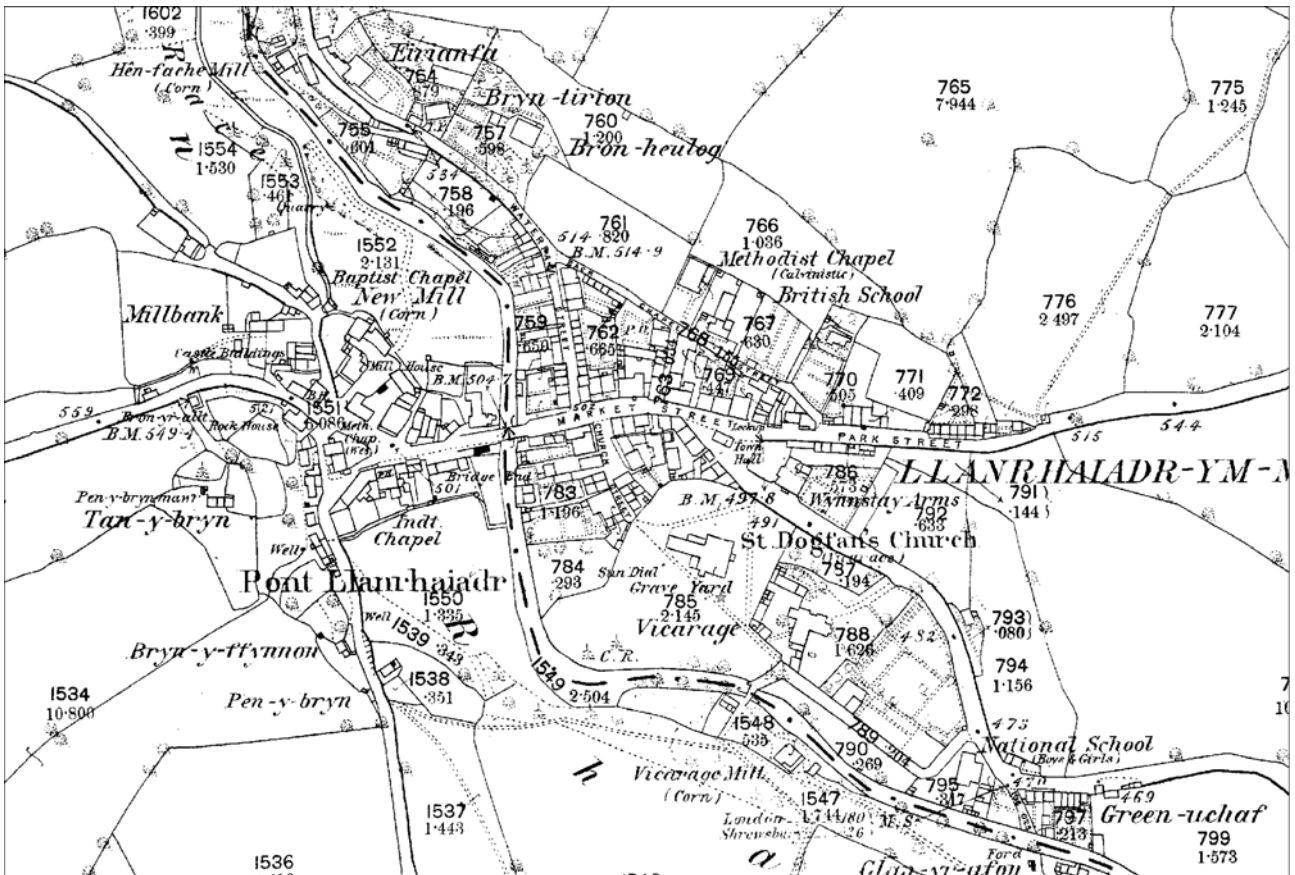# CPAT Report No 1134

Historic settlements in Montgomeryshire

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Report for Cadw

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The historic settlements of the former county of Montgomeryshire – an Introduction

Background

Twenty years ago the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust compiled an assessment of the historic settlements of Montgomeryshire, on behalf of Cadw and the then Montgomeryshire District Council. It was one of several such assessments for the local authority areas of eastern Wales and ultimately ten reports were completed between 1992 and 1995, embracing the entire region for which CPAT had and retains a remit.

The imperative that underpinned these surveys was committed to paper for the first time when Brecknock Borough was studied in 1993, being expressed in the following terms:

> It has long been recognised that development within town and village alike [might] disturb or obliterate significant information about the past, but a suitable response to a specific building development or other permanent land use change has usually been instigated, if at all, on an ad hoc basis. A more structured approach to the understanding of historic settlements and the preservation and management of this fragile resource is required. This has been given a greater urgency by the publication in 1991 of the Welsh version of the Planning and Policy Guidance Note: Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16 Wales). This emphasises the responsibilities of Local Planning Authorities in the conservation of the archaeological heritage and confirms that archaeological remains are a material consideration when determining planning applications (Martin and Walters 1993, 3).

Three principal objectives of the study were defined at that time, though they were already implicit in the Montgomeryshire assessment of 1992:

> i) to produce a general picture of historic settlement in the area,
> ii) to identify, in as far as the evidence allows, those areas within the historic settlements that could be termed archaeologically sensitive, in order to assist in the day-to-day and long-term planning processes initiated by the local authority, and
> iii) to define areas of potential archaeological significance where developers might be required to undertake an archaeological evaluation as part of the planning process.

The individual village histories were never intended for publication, but their contents were absorbed into the Sites and Monuments Record (now the Historic Environment Record) where they could be accessed and recycled, usually without any acknowledgement to their source, in others' reports.

There is no need to stress that in the twenty years since that report on Montgomeryshire's towns and villages was circulated to a relatively small number of interested organisations, there have been changes, and we would hope improvements, to our collective perception of the emergence, development and in some instances collapse of historic settlements in the border counties and more specifically in Montgomeryshire.

Firstly, a series of Cadw-funded site-condition studies have appeared which directly or indirectly have had a bearing on settlement studies. The historic churches survey (1995-99), the early medieval ecclesiastical sites survey (2001-04) and even the deserted medieval rural settlement survey (1996-2001) have all played a part in enhancing our understanding of settlement patterns and development in eastern Wales, as have some rather more specific and detailed ground surveys such as those of village earthworks in Brecknock (1993) and Radnorshire (1996), though none unfortunately for Montgomeryshire.

Secondly, there are the results that have accrued from client-funded works on development sites – whether excavation, evaluation, watching brief or building recording – as a result of local authorities implementing PPG16 and, from 2002, the guidelines contained in Planning Policy Wales.

Thirdly, there are recently published studies which have transformed our thinking on certain topics. Most notable in this context are the place-name studies by Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan (2007), the first volume of the early medieval inscribed stones corpus prepared by Mark Redknap and John Lewis (2007) and Richard Suggett's Houses and History in the March of Wales. Radnorshire 1400-1800 published by the Welsh Royal Commission in 2005. Neither of these last two is directly pertinent to Montgomeryshire but both illustrate the quality of some of the work that has recently been completed or is in progress in the Principality.

Finally though in some ways the least tangible of the inputs is the ever-improving perception and appreciation of settlement development and the patterns that are fostered in east Wales, as a result of accumulated expertise, and the accessing of research from both other regions of Wales and from England. This doesn't normally manifest itself in publications, although the writer's paper, co-authored with Wyn Evans (2009) on clas churches and their landscapes is an exception.

In 2010 CPAT felt that the time had come to re-examine the pictures of its historic settlements, fifteen to twenty years on from when the initial studies were completed. In a general sense, various questions had been raised. Had developer-funding in advance of the potential destruction or damage to the cultural heritage had much of an effect and if so where? Had our knowledge and appreciation of the historic settlements in the region markedly improved in the last fifteen to twenty years? And in a departure from the practice in the early 1990s when the Internet was little more than an unfulfilled dream, could we successfully disseminate that information authoritatively so that it could be accessed digitally to satisfy the increasing number of people who search our website? There are several hundred historic settlements in eastern Wales and it was not possible to examine them all in a single exercise. The former local authority areas of Brecknock Borough and Radnorshire were selected to initiate the programme in 2010-11 and this has been followed with studies of Montgomeryshire and Flintshire in 2011-12. We hope to complete the remaining areas over the next two years.

Methodology and presentation

The 1992 report. A pattern for each report was established in 1992 comprising a report which covered a minimum of one A4 page of text and in some instances, depending on the size and interest of the settlement involved, three or four pages. The report considered, under four sub-headings, the geographic location of the settlement, the known history of its origins and development, the buildings and archaeology that were integral elements of the settlement, and finally a set of recommendations for further work.

Accompanying each settlement study was an Ordnance Survey map-based depiction of the settlement showing scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, known archaeological features and earthworks, areas which it was felt at the time should be preserved in situ, other areas that should be evaluated in advance of development, and a boundary line drawn around the historic settlement as it was then recognised, in other words the perceived historic core of the town or village.

Those early reports also contained as annexes a copy of the descriptive brief for the preparation of the study and another of a draft paper on archaeology and the planning process in Powys

The 2012 report. After various discussions the configuration of both the text layout and the accompanying map have been revised, to take account of changing circumstances and current requirements.

The baseline information – the settlement name, the national gird reference and the primary record number that links the settlement (as well as its individual elements) to the Historic

Environment Record – have necessarily remained the same, although the height above sea level and the prefix PRN have been dropped.

The geographic location has been retained, as has the section on history, now renamed 'history of development'. More change can be seen in the section formerly headed 'buildings and archaeology' which has been altered to 'the heritage to 1750'. This alteration results from two considerations. Firstly, it is becoming increasingly commonplace to refer to the cultural heritage and cultural heritage assets, convenient collective terms that embrace not only below and above-ground archaeology, and buildings, but also historic landscape (and townscape) elements that did not necessarily get the recognition that they warrant in the former terminology. Cultural heritage is seen as a useful shorthand descriptive term for everything that we are concerned with here. Secondly, a decision was taken to end the study at 1750, bringing it into line with Cadw's terminal date for the concurrent scoping programme of medieval and early post-medieval monument scheduling enhancement. 1750 to 1760 is often seen as a starting date for the Industrial Revolution, even if its full 'flowering' did not occur in Wales for another fifty years. Equally importantly, however, it was during the later 18th century and a little beyond that, some settlements saw marked development with a concomitant increase in the number of buildings, and the diminishing significance in the forms of evidence that are significant to the archaeologist. Llandrindod Wells, the leading settlement in old Radnorshire and the home to Powys County Council, offers an instructive example. This is not to downplay the significance of the buildings that date from the later 18th and 19th centuries, nor to infer that settlements that contain large numbers of such structures are not historic, rather it is a commentary on the shift in the nature of the evidence that is available to us.

This report has also tried to adopt a more rigorous approach to the presentation of the data, whether it be on archaeological sites, buildings or the townscape. It would be easy to write protracted descriptions of some buildings such as churches or earthwork complexes, or even in some instances the discoveries from development-led evaluations. The regurgitation of much detail, it was felt, would not necessarily be particularly useful to the general reader, and indeed might act as a deterrent. The inclusion of PRN numbers will allow the researcher or enthusiast to follow up individual leads in the regional Historic Environment Record should they wish, but what is offered here is a concise text covering as many issues as are currently known without over-elaboration on any one of them.

Finally, the section of recommendations has been removed. This, it should be admitted, is in part a pragmatic decision based on the realisation that some of the original recommendations covering standard issues such as the importance of consultation with the archaeological curator, the need for watching briefs and evaluations, and the like were compiled at a time when PPG16 was new, consultation practice was yet to be regularised, and the importance of the cultural heritage resource in our towns and villages had in some areas yet to be appreciated by at least some local authority planners. This situation has changed, and the importance of the cultural heritage is now largely accepted at local government level. It is pragmatic, however, for less satisfactory reasons. In an ideal world the recommendation for Hirnant that the relict earthworks of the churchyard should be surveyed' or 'the in-depth topographical and historical survey of Montgomery' would have been followed up and completed at some point over the last twenty years. That these aims have not been achieved is less a comment on the validity of the recommendation, more on the limited resources that are available for surveying and research: it is unrealistic to assume that this is going to change in the foreseeable future.

There have also been some modifications to the plans that accompany the texts. The depiction of designated archaeological sites (scheduling) and buildings (listing) has been left out, for we are conscious of the fact that it is entirely the prerogative of Cadw and/or the local authority to define these sites in cartographic form, and that the reader requiring information on the extent of a designation should approach the appropriate authority for that information. Furthermore, the number and extent of designated sites within any given settlement will change through time, and assuming that these maps have a currency measured in years, there is the potential for misleading a reader because the situation could have changed.

The definition of the historic core has also been modified, taking more account of existing boundaries in order to lessen any potential contention over whether a particular spot lies inside or outside the historic core as we perceive it. We would stress that the core boundary as defined is not an immutable perimeter, but is simply an estimate and a guide based on an assessment of the existing evidence by the writer as to where earlier settlement may once have existed.

Dropped too is the zonation of areas for evaluation in advance of development. In 1992, defining such areas was a useful guide to planners as to where archaeological intervention was most needed, but there is a potential conflict between the depiction of one or two such areas on a map on the one hand and the definition of the historic core on the other. If for whatever reason, an area within an historic core envelope is not highlighted for evaluation, this could be taken as an indication that the area would not require further assessment in the event of a proposed development. Rather we must work on the assumption that any development within an historic core could be a candidate for an evaluation, depending of course on the nature of the development itself, but that it should be the development control officer at CPAT who makes that decision, based on his own professional judgment.

More contentious perhaps is the decision to omit the identification of blocks of land defined as 'areas for preservation in situ', another facet of the 1992 survey. Where such areas are already statutorily designated within an historic settlement, their preservation is a given and no problem arises. However, in some cases in the past a decision that an area ought to be preserved has been taken on the basis of a rather superficial assessment of its worth, rather than on a detailed analysis of what is there. If, then, at a planning level a field containing earthworks is going to be preserved it needs to be based on rigorously defined evidence that will stand up to objective scrutiny, and this requires a detailed record that is rarely accessible through a report of this nature.

One final aspect to clarify is that the historic core envelope now defines only those areas within which there is the likelihood of settlement, by which we mean dwellings and their curtilages. The setting of any settlement will have been the surrounding landscape that was farmed and utilised from it, and potentially could spread over several square kilometres. Defining its fields, its pastures and its woodlands will be a considerable task, and its success cannot be guaranteed. Vital though it is to an understanding of that settlement, the inclusion of the setting within the historic core cannot be advocated. It requires a different level of zoning.

The original study of Montgomeryshire listed 98 settlements. The current survey covers 60. Omitted are several settlements that reflect only post-1750 developments such as Abermule, Middletown, Pool Quay and Staylittle, and places such as Cefn Coch and Llanbrynmair which have grown up around an inn. Included in the total are four settlements that were never in Montgomeryshire, but are now in Powys: Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr, Llangadwaladr, Llangedwyn and Llansilin; and to these can be added that part of Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant which lies on the north side of the river, formerly a part of Denbighshire, but now united with the south bank in modern Powys. In addition, three places in the historic county of Montgomeryshire with pre-1750 churches have been assessed for the first Time: Penrhos, Penstrowed and Snead.

An overview of Montgomeryshire's historic settlements

The 1992 study provided a thorough assessment of the settlements in what was then the historic county of Montgomeryshire. Attention was paid in the overview to the prevalence of settlements where the term llan was incorporated into the name, and subsequent studies for other counties considered such themes as the difference between dispersed and nucleated settlement, the theories of the late Glanville Jones on nucleated bond settlements, the primacy of sub-circular churchyards, earthwork mottes where settlements were attached, and settlements displaying English (or more correctly Anglo-Norman) influences. It is not proposed to cover the same ground here, but as with previous reports (for Radnorshire and Brecknock Borough) in the present round of assessments, rather to look at the various forms of settlement to identify what patterns emerge.

The categorisation of towns and villages is often difficult and sometimes impossible, based as it is on sparse evidence. Form and shape, or more correctly termed morphology, provides guidance

on planned towns and villages, the presence of older buildings can offer clues as to whether there was some level of nucleation in a settlement in the Tudor era, though rarely before that time. Both of these characteristics provide positive evidence which can be relied on. In contrast, negative evidence used to support a particular contention, may or may not be reliable. There is no immediate way of knowing. For example, we suggest here that Garthbeibio is a 'church settlement', a class of settlement where a historic church is today accompanied solely by some other building such as an inn or farm, or in the recent past appeared in this form. It is an assumption, based on the absence of both observable surface traces and relict features depicted on 19th century maps, as well as the visual similarity with so many other places in Powys, that this form of settlement has always been present at Garthbeibio. But it can be no more than assumption, for only by carefully excavating the entire area around the church could we be certain that it had stood alone in the medieval era.

Overall, the number of settlements where we have positive evidence is heavily outweighed by those underpinned by negative evidence alone. Hence the categorisation below is little more than provisional, and is likely to stay so for the foreseeable future.

Planned settlements

There are six settlements which reveal elements of deliberate planning, and they account for all of Montgomeryshire's historic towns. The emphasis is different from town to town. Newtown and Llanidloes display a classic grid network, although detailed assessment shows some irregularities. It is no coincidence that these are the two planned towns which are thought to have been protected by defences, though in the case of the former, the actual evidence is virtually non-existent. Machynlleth with its T-form is different, as is Welshpool in that its regular cross shape is distorted by the long length of High Street and Broad Street though this may result from an extension from the original core. Montgomery's plan is constrained by its topography while Llanfyllin, the smallest of the group, also shows a regular cross shape.

Llanfyllin	Machynlleth	Newtown
Llanidloes	Montgomery	Welshpool

Nucleated village settlements

Nucleated settlements are well attested in southern Powys, primarily because of the survival of earthworks that point to dwellings and their crofts. In comparison there are relatively few in the northern historic counties of Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire.

Of the five identified below, Llanrhaeadr stands alone, for with a little more subjectivity it might have been fitted into the group of planned towns above. It has a market place and some indications of a planned layout, but has yet to be the subject of a full morphological analysis. For the present it is simply classified here as a nucleated settlement in the Middle Ages and Tudor period. Berriew, Churchstoke and Llansilin share an attribute – in each case close to the church was an open area of common which would perhaps have attracted dwellings around its perimeter in the early post-medieval era, if not before. Guilsfield may also have had its open common, but the evidence is less persuasive.

This is a pattern encountered elsewhere in the United Kingdom, though we should be cautious in comparing them directly with the typical lowland 'greens' that can be seen in East Anglia or Sussex. And in the studies of southern Powys we have encountered similar village phenomena, as at Glasbury and Painscastle in Radnorshire though in both places, there was also a castle which was in existence before the adjacent village developed. This leads on to another category of settlement.

Berriew	Guilsfield	Llansilin
Churchstoke	Llanrhaeadr	

Castle settlements

It can be argued that Hyssington is a castle settlement, the church down on lower ground below the castle, the settlement if any such exists, adjacent to the church. Castle Caereinion might come into this class as well, although the mound in the corner of the churchyard has yet to be convincingly proven to be a castle motte. Most castle settlements could well be classified under other headings, an indication if one were needed that the original impetus for a settlement and the morphology that it exhibits are not mutually exclusive.

Castle Caereinion   Hyssington

Church settlements

In number alone, church settlements top the list of site types. Over 60% of the historic settlements in Montgomeryshire can provisionally be included in the group. 'Church settlement' is a useful collective term, although it is one that doesn't figure in the classic texts on historic settlement. In that some degree of grouping or nucleation might be assumed in the definition of a settlement, the term is indeed virtually a paradox. For, as noted above, the morphology of a church settlement hinges on the fact that the church appears to be isolated by itself or perhaps with no more than a single farm, an inn or a rectory for company. The church, then, is itself the settlement – it is a concept rather than a physical manifestation of what we would consider a settlement to consist of, namely dwellings. Virtually all of these are of medieval origin, but there are two exceptions. Penrhos was formerly a chapel-of-ease built on a common in 1625, while Criggion church came into existence soon after the Restoration of Charles II; it had a predecessor but the location of this earlier church or chapel is not known.

In some instances we can speculate that former dwellings have been abandoned or swept away leaving few if any visible traces. Putative bond settlements of earlier medieval date could be candidates. Demonstrating that this was or wasn't the case is, however, virtually impossible. But some churches almost certainly never attracted more than a solitary dwelling around them, for from medieval times and perhaps even earlier, they served a community which was dispersed in farms and cottages across the parish. Archaeological work may perhaps reveal in years to come that some of those in the list below were accompanied by dwellings in earlier centuries, and this is where developer-funding projects could be critical. For the present in terms of nucleation these places occupy the bottom rung of the ladder.

Aberhafesp	Llanerfyl	Llanwrin
Buttington	Llanfechain	Llanwyddelan
Cemmaes	Llanfihangel	Manafon
Criggion	Llangadfan	Mochdre
Darowen	Llangadwaladr	Penegoes
Forden	Llangedwyn	Pennant Melangell
Garthbeibio	Llangurig	Penrhos
Hirnant	Llangynog	Penstrowed
Llan	Llangynyw	Snead
Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr	Llanllugan	Trefeglwys
Llandrinio	Llanllwrchaiarn	Trelystan
Llandysilio	Llanmerewig	
Llandyssil	Llanwnnog	

Settlements of uncertain nature

There are some settlements that currently defy categorisation: the evidence that is available to us is insufficient to place them in any of the groups already discussed. It seems improbable that further documentary research or topographic analysis will resolve the problem; only

archaeological excavation will throw any light on the matter. Llandinam seems to have been an important place in the Middle Ages, its church the focus of an significant ecclesiastical centre, yet the nature of any secular settlement here is obscure. Carno has both its church and the earthwork enclosure that was home to the Knights Hospitallers, but the combination does not mean that a dependant community grew up around the complex. Kerry has the superficial appearance of a nucleated settlement of long standing, yet there is nothing to corroborate that this was indeed the case.

Bettws Cedwain	Llandinam	Meifod
Carno	Llanfair Caereinion	Tregynon
Kerry	Llansantffraid	