

Meifod

SJ 1551 1332
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Introduction

Meifod straddles the B4389 which follows the River Vyrnwy as it meanders along the wide U-shaped valley of Dyffryn Meifod in central Montgomeryshire. Llanfair Caereinion lies 9km to the south-west, Welshpool 9km to the south-east. For much of its course the river valley is rather less than one kilometre wide; its palaeochannels, gravel fans and terraces are obvious, particularly from the air. Meifod occupies the valley floor less than 300m from the river, and it was formerly much closer, the churchyard edge appearing to follow the scarp of a gravel terrace. The presence of a flood embankment encircling the village is testimony to the problems of this low-lying location.

The church lies at the heart of the village, and the focus for settlement in past centuries has been along High Street and around the churchyard. This pattern is now changing for modern development has resulted in a substantially larger spread of housing covering the northern edge of the valley floor beyond the primary school, and is now spreading north-eastwards beside the road to Oswestry.

This brief report examines Meifod'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 lines defining the historic cores offer a visual interpretation of the area within which settlement developed in the medieval era, based on our interpretation of the evidence currently to hand. These are not immutable boundary lines, 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).

History of development

The earliest church is said to have been built here by St Gwyddfarch in c.550 and later Meifod became the cult centre of his more famous pupil, St Tysilio. With its large churchyard extending over more than 5 acres, it comes as no surprise that Meifod functioned as a mother-church with a *clas* community in the early medieval period. Traditionally, it was the burial place of the princes of Powys whose seat was at Mathrafal, 3km away, though this view may simply be a back-projection of a practice that occurred in the 12th century.

The name appears first as *Meiuot* in the 12th century and *Meyvod* in the Taxation of 1254. Literally translated as 'middle dwelling', Meifod – and this is one example of several such in Wales – could have been related to the seasonal movement and grazing of stock in much earlier times.

The nature and development of the settlement here through the Middle Ages has yet to be established. It could be argued with equal validity that the church might have occupied a solitary location through the medieval era, or alternatively that people could have gravitated to it, thus creating a nucleated settlement. Either is plausible.



Meifod, photo 80-c-0261, © CPAT, 2012

The heritage to 1750

The existing parish church of SS Tysilio and Mary (50460) may be the one recorded as having been consecrated in 1156. This would fit with the surviving Romanesque architecture at the west end of the present building which reveals a relatively complex history. The rest is 14th and 15th century with some rebuilding in the first half of the 19th century. Internal fittings are predominantly post-medieval in date, but there is a fine memorial cross-decorated slab (6049), variously dated to the 9th/10th or 12th century.

The churchyard is semi-circular (7663), its southern edge beside a small stream draining across the valley floor. A scarp bank just within this boundary is certainly a natural terrace but a case can be made for it being the line of an earlier churchyard. Encroachment on the original enclosure has occurred on both the north-east side beside the main road and more significantly on the west, but it is still the largest churchyard in Powys.

A chapel dedicated to St Gwyddfarch (PAR 50458) is claimed to have lain in the western part of the churchyard and may still have been visible in 1631 when it was referred to in a terrier. Its outline was recorded during the construction of the Congregational Chapel in the 1880s and glazed floor tiles were recovered. References to a church dedicated solely to St Tysilio add to an unresolved question as to how many churches were accommodated in this churchyard. Views differ as to whether there was formerly a separate church of St Tysilio (75) nearby, or whether it was directly replaced by the Norman church of St Mary (50459).

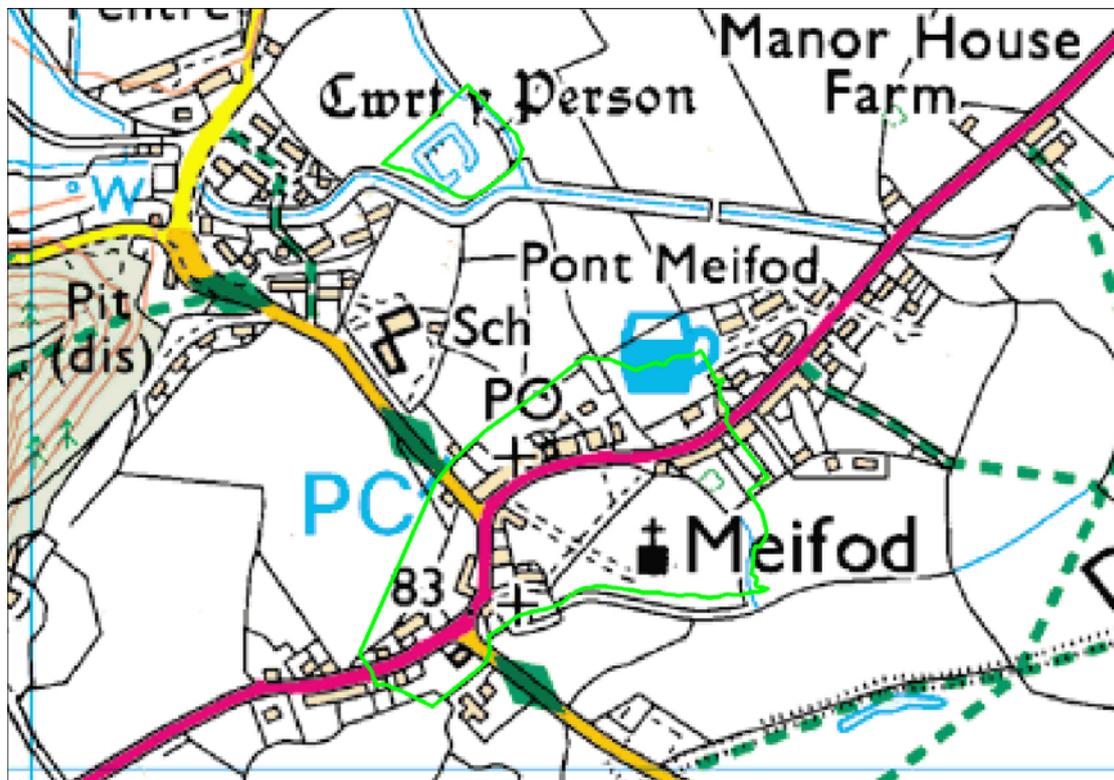
Eighteenth-century maps suggest a broad thoroughfare, now the modern road, around the north and west sides of the churchyard. The maps are not particularly comprehensive in their

depictions of buildings, but there do not seem to have been many on the north side until the beginning of the 19th century, and this is borne out by the surviving architecture.

Most buildings in the village – the church excepted – are later than 1825, but the King's Head (7661), a grade II listed building is attributed to the final year of the 18th century. A little beyond the village on the hill slope overlooking the valley is the Old Vicarage (32464), a grade II listed building which was built by the local incumbent in 1720.

A fine moated enclosure, Cwrt y Person (74) lies back from the road and river, and closer to the valley slopes. Low banks, now barely visible, may have defined an outer court. The enclosure is presumably medieval in date, and bears similarities to that at nearby Guilsfield. The name points to it being a moated vicarage.

Traces of ridge and furrow cultivation show up on aerial photographs in several fields around the village, but these require confirmation from fieldwork (7664, 7665 & 7666) and the date of these cultivation marks remains unknown.



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