

Marford

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SJ 3595 5628

Introduction

Marford is located on the B5445 which was formerly the A483 between Wrexham and Chester, 4.5km north-east of the former, before the Wrexham bypass usurped its number. Modern housing development has now merged it with the adjacent villages of Pant and Gresford. It is positioned at the northern end and foot of a steep promontory, close to a ford over the River Alyn. Quarrying has, however, severely altered the local topography.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Marford to around 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 putative historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core offers a visual interpretation of the area within which the settlement may have 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

Marford, in its earliest form, appears as *Merford(e)* in 1315, and seemingly means 'boundary ford'. The Dictionary of Welsh place-names (2007) points out that there was a ford across the River Alun to the west of the settlement, with the river forming the boundary between the historic counties of Flintshire and Denbighshire. As the former was established by statute in 1284, the chronology fits. As late as the beginning of the 18th century, the place-name was still spelt with an 'e' rather than an 'a', and Samuel Lewis as late as 1833 also preferred the former.

Marford was never a parish in its own right. It had no church and was always part of the ecclesiastical parish of Gresford. For secular purposes Marford was apparently a commote, an administrative unit that might or might not have had a nucleated settlement at its centre. The name has also been attached to a township and a medieval provostry.

Though the Old English place-name elements imply a pre-Conquest landscape and one that was perhaps settled, the former motte and bailey constructed on top of the promontory is the first tangible indication of medieval activity. This may have been the castle of Bromfield which was burnt down in 1140, but probably rebuilt for it was mentioned in a document of c.1161. A mill was referred to here in 1315, and it has recently been suggested that it could have been in existence as early as 1050 though the integrity of the evidence for this claim is not clear. More hypothetical still is the belief that there was an 8th-century Mercian defensive post and mustering place on the promontory.

After this, the historical record is sporadic: there are references to the township of Marford and Hoseley, and with the formation of the lordship of Bromfield and Yale in 1282, Marford and Hoseley materialised as one of the manors within it. Neither of these necessarily implies the presence of a settlement, and many of the records that do exist relate to the township.

However, it needs to be noted that Marford and Hoseley reputedly functioned as a *maerdref* in the Middle Ages, a reeve's settlement that supported a nearby royal court. This should signify a nucleated settlement in say the 12th century, perhaps even going back into the early medieval era. Though tenurial references to it were still evident in the administration of the township in the 1470s, nothing specific is known of the form or size of the *maerdref* (settlement), nor its precise location. It has been suggested however that the court was established on the now quarried away promontory, within the larger bailey attached to the motte, close to where Roff Hall was constructed in the 1570s.

An estate map of 1787 reveals the extent of the settlement at the end of the 18th century before it was redesigned as an estate village (see below). Some 18 dwellings were grouped around a road junction many of them seemingly in much the same positions as their 19th-century estate cottage successors. The road pattern shows some sign of change: Marford Hill Road, the present B5445, was preceded by a track 50m to the east, while another lane ran almost due south from where the Trevor Arms now stands, its former position marked by a continuous property boundary.

The heritage to 1750

The motte and bailey castle, known as The Roff (101298) and set within the ramparts of an Iron Age hillfort, formerly existed above the village, but was almost completely erased by quarrying in the middle of the twentieth century. Records, additional to those noted above, suggest that it was already ruinous by the 1280s when it was burnt by the Welshmen of Bromfield in the face of the advance by Edward I's army.

The core of the present village is of estate housing commissioned by George Boscawen of Trevalyn Hall. The cottages are all of a similar Gothic cottage style, distinctive and unusual. Building may have commenced in 1803, was certainly in progress in 1814 when a Wiltshire architect was employed and was completed by 1820. Most of the buildings are Grade II listed.

To the north-east of the village near the crossing of the Alyn lie Marford Mill (100363) and Trevalyn Hall (100376), the latter a mansion built in 1576, accompanied by 16th-century outbuildings. The former obviously has a long history for it was destroyed during the Glyndŵr rebellion and then rebuilt seventy years later, but its site is now occupied by a 19th-century mill building, itself now converted.

There is no suggestion that any of the buildings in the settlement are older than the early 19th century and no tangible evidence of earlier activity, though its existence is of course confirmed by the 1787 map. Of the medieval settlement – the *maerdref* – nothing is known of its location and if it was in the vicinity of the castle, it will have disappeared through quarrying. However, it is perhaps more likely that it lay below the promontory with its castle and thus could have been beneath the much later estate village.

For a fuller exposition on the *maerdref* the reader is referred to Derrick Pratt's 1992 article 'Fourteenth century Marford and Hosley: a maerdref in transition', in the *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*.



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