

Bodfari

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Introduction

The village of Bodfari is situated on sloping ground at the foot of Moel y Gaer. Here there is a gap in the Clwydian hills, the only natural break in the range, and through it flows the River Wheeler. East-west road communications have, naturally, utilised this easier passage through the hills.

Bodfari lies 7km south-east of St Asaph and was in the historic county of Flintshire, before its merger in Clwyd, though following Edward Lhuyd we should note that in past times only the church and about a third of the parish was in Flintshire, and the rest of the parish was in Denbighshire. It is now in the local authority area of Denbighshire. The B5429, running north/south along the eastern edge of the Vale of Clwyd, passes through the village centre, whilst the A541, running from east to west skirts the southern fringe of the settlement.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Bodfari up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it might be necessary to look at other sources of information and in particular at the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered only 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 will require modification 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. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The first record of Bodfari in a document comes in Domesday in 1087 as *Boteuuarul*. Six years later, the church and manor at *Batavari* were given to the monks of St Werburgh's in Chester. The church is mentioned again in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 as *Bottewaru* and in Pope Nicholas' Taxation of 1291 as *Botevarro*. There are several further documentary references in the 14th and 16th centuries, but the modern form of the name did not emerge until 1839. Modern authorities admit that this is a difficult name to explain, despite the frequent forms that have come down to us. The first element *bod* is probably straightforward and means house or dwelling, so the name, it is suggested, could mean 'the abode of revered Barre' but this is by no means a certain conclusion, and even if correct tells us nothing about who the individual was.

The date at which settlement emerged around the church is completely unknown. The recorded presence of a church before the end of the 11th century probably reveals that it was a pre-Conquest foundation, i.e. of early medieval origin, and was traditionally linked to a 6th-7th-century holy man, St Deifer (or Dier or Diheufyr) who makes an appearance in 'The Life of St Wenefride' and has been classed as an abbot. If this were actually the case it would signal a higher status church at Bodfari.

Much time could have elapsed before dwellings developed around the church, and the size of the village at Bodfari in the Middle Ages, assuming there was one, cannot be determined.

Even in the post-medieval period, it is not possible to establish the size of the village around the church. Edward Lhuyd's correspondent in the late 17th century failed to record the number present, and estate maps from 1738 and the late 18th century, the latter showing Bodfari with four dwellings around the church, present schematic pictures that are probably not accurate representations of the settlement at those times. Bodfari was on the itinerary of some antiquaries, but only because it was one of the reputed locations for the Roman centre of *Varis*. Thus Richard Fenton in 1808 briefly mentioned the village in his diary but expended much more ink on describing his unsuccessful search for *Varis* in the company of Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

The village does not appear to have grown much before the Tithe survey of 1845, when five or six houses were depicted on its map, nor has there been very much further expansion up to the present day. The plan of the roads and fields has hardly altered.

The village centre now consists of the church, a Public House, Tyddyn Llan farm, a rectory and a small number of houses, most of which appeared on 19th-century maps. Some more modern housing and a school has been added on to the outer edges of the historic core of the settlement.

The heritage to 1750

St Stephen's church (102172) has a late medieval western tower with Perpendicular bell-chamber openings, a battered base and a battlemented parapet. The remainder of the church was rebuilt in 1864-5 replacing a whitewashed church with an undivided nave and chancel, a south aisle and timber arcade. The new building reputedly followed the plan of the old, but for the introduction of a chancel arch. Inside, the font is of the 16th century, the altar table and pulpit are dated 1635 and there is a memorial to John Mostyn who died in 1671. The church stands in an elevated position, overlooking the village.

The churchyard (105818) has a faintly curving boundary on its south-western side, which may perhaps hint at a former circular shape, but otherwise has a rectilinear shape that in part is due to the local topography.

The site of Ffynnon Diefer, (102014) a holy well named after the reputed founder of the church, St Diefer, is no longer readily visible, and now lies in an area of wasteland south-east of the modern 'Ysgol Bodfari'. Mentioned in Edward Lhuyd's description of the parish at the very end of the 17th century, the well was 100 metres or so south-west of the church and was stone-lined with steps leading to it.

Only two buildings other than the church are recorded in detail as being of any age. The Dinorben Arms (105819) nestling below the churchyard is a 17th-century brick building that has been altered. The Old Rectory (105820) to the north-west of the church is late 18th-century. Hafod-tan-yr-eglwys, formerly known as Ty-gwyn and named as such on modern Ordnance Survey maps, lies immediately to the west of the churchyard and may have a mid-18th-century origin; it was termed a 'poor cottage' in 1843, but is now a fine Regency-style structure of presumably slightly later date.

Of the remainder of the buildings in the village, the following two are worthy of mention: Tyddynllan Farmhouse (105820) is also worth mentioning and is probably one of the buildings shown on the late 18th-century estate map, referred to above. A watching brief in

2000 identified a brick-lined well here with a graveslab of 18th-century date re-used as a capstone.

Nothing akin to village earthworks have been recognised in the vicinity of Bodfari.



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