

Cynwyd

SJ 0560 4110

105954

Introduction

Cynwyd has grown up on the eastern flank of the Dee Valley at a point where a tributary of the river, Afon Trystion, has etched a sharp notch down the western slope of the Berwyn. The village occupies a low spur projecting from the river terrace towards the main river some 300m away. A crossroads serves as the focus of the settlement with houses spreading up the tributary valley eastwards, and a more industrial element closer to the Dee. Corwen is just over 3km to the north-west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Cynwyd up to the year 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 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

Cynwyd is a personal name, though the person behind the name is not known to history. As a place-name *Kowryt* (or *Conryt*) is first recorded in 1292-3 while one of the constituent townships was referred to as *Kynnwyd Vawr* in 1470. The present form of the name appeared as late as 1838.

It is worth noting Derek Pratt's view that this location on the Dee valley edge marked the point where perhaps during the prehistoric and medieval periods an east to west routeway from England traversed the northern watershed of the Berwyn and then ran down the valley of Afon Trystion to a Dee crossing. This was a spot where the flood plain of the Dee narrowed with a spur of higher ground projecting from the western side to match the one on the east utilised by Cynwyd. Such a potentially significant point on the communications network could well have seen settlement or other activity at a much earlier date, and Pratt considered it the only place in Llangar Community suitable for village development.

Its early history has not been established. Possibly succeeding a place at or near Rug, Cynwyd can be recognised as the *caput* or centre of the commote of Edeirnion in the later Middle Ages and is referred to in passing in 12th-century Welsh poetry. It has been claimed too that 'Cwnwyd with its doctor, merchant, and cobblers [and also crowdors or fiddlers] has been described as one of the few places in Merioneth which resembled a town' at the end of the 13th century, when its 45 tenants collectively paid the highest subsidy in the commote. A Dee Valley website informs us that it was formerly 'the site of the ancient boundary courts', but

this could be a reference to a John Davies's comment of 1716 that a court had been held in Cynwyd within the memory of several people in his own lifetime.

Yet now the village has the appearance of a post-medieval development. Lhuyd at the end of the 17th century recorded a village of nine houses and a mill, but it was not of sufficient size to register with any of the 17th and 18th-century mapmakers such as Speed, or Bowen and Kitchen, though the absence of a church during these times will not have encouraged its mapping.

Not an ecclesiastical unit in its own right, Cynwyd even in the early 19th century lay in the parish of Gwyddelwern, and functioned as a centre of flannel manufacture. The church was consecrated only in 1856, the much older parish church of Llangar, almost certainly a medieval foundation being little more than one kilometre away.

Cynwyd is now the centre of a community, one of the modern administrative units.



Cynwyd, photo 95-C-0249, © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

Pont Dyfrdwy with its four arches spanning the River Dee has been claimed to date from 1612 and is assumed to be the bridge referred to by Edward Lhuyd at the end of the 17th century. Strengthened in 1989, it is both scheduled and listed.

The bridge carrying the main road through the village over the little Afon Trystion is almost certainly 19th-century in origin. Originally the road looped eastwards and crossed the river by a smaller bridge – Pont Trystion - which is still in existence. Undoubtedly this is post-medieval in date, probably 18th-century, and the local tradition that it has been here since Roman times can be dismissed. However, the tradition may have been fed by the acknowledged fact that Llewelyn ap Madog left money in his will for the repair of the crossing here in 1357.

Other than this bridge there are no buildings of pre-1750 origin in the village. The exception is Bryn Berllan now on the western edge of the village but formerly standing alone overlooking Pont Dyfrdwy, which is a two-storey 16th-century box-framed farmhouse, much altered in the late 20th century. The mill constructed in the mid-19th century occupies the site of its predecessor which was recorded in the 17th century.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.