

Gwenddwr

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Introduction

Gwenddwr is a remote and rather amorphous settlement on the eastern fringes of Mynydd Epynt. It occupies the southern side of the steep-sided Nant Gwenddwr, a minor tributary of the Wye.

This brief report examines its 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 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 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).



Gwenddwr village, photo 95-C-0358 © CPAT 2011

History of development

The settlement appears to have taken its name from the stream that flows below it, Gwenddwr being the Welsh for 'white water'. Its earliest appearance is as *Wendor* in 1241, and *Gwentur* is documented in 1513.

Gwenddwr was traditionally founded in the 6th century by St Dubricius, to whom the church is dedicated, and who is said to have had a 'seminary named after him on the banks of the Wye in the parish of Gwenddwr'. It is not clear if this seminary was within the modern settlement at Gwenddwr. This original church could have been a *clas* foundation, functioning as a mother church for the region, but there is no later evidence to confirm that this was the case.

Documentary evidence points to a grange (or farm) here in the 14th century, belonging to the Cistercian Dore Abbey in Herefordshire, but not a daughter priory as has been suggested in the past. The exact location of the grange is unknown, and it is little more than speculation that St Dubricius' church was a chapel for it. The abbey's lands are recorded as being purchased by a David Williams at the Dissolution.

The heritage to 1750

The single cell church of St. Dubricius (20157) was extensively restored and reopened in 1886 after a fire in 1875, although some 14th-century fabric survives. It remains unknown and probably unknowable as to whether the present church had its origins in a monastic building.

The present churchyard (20158) is small and sub-rectangular, less than 0.2ha in area, though this may represent a substantial reduction from its former extent. The southern churchyard boundary is curvilinear and adjoining property boundaries continue this line to form an almost complete circuit enclosing around 1.43ha. This larger sub-circular enclosure (2918) arguably would be in keeping with traditional 6th-century foundations and the early monastic associations of the site. If this 'enclosure' is an early ecclesiastical site, however, it occupies an extremely steep slope and the 14th-century church occupies an unusually eccentric position within it.

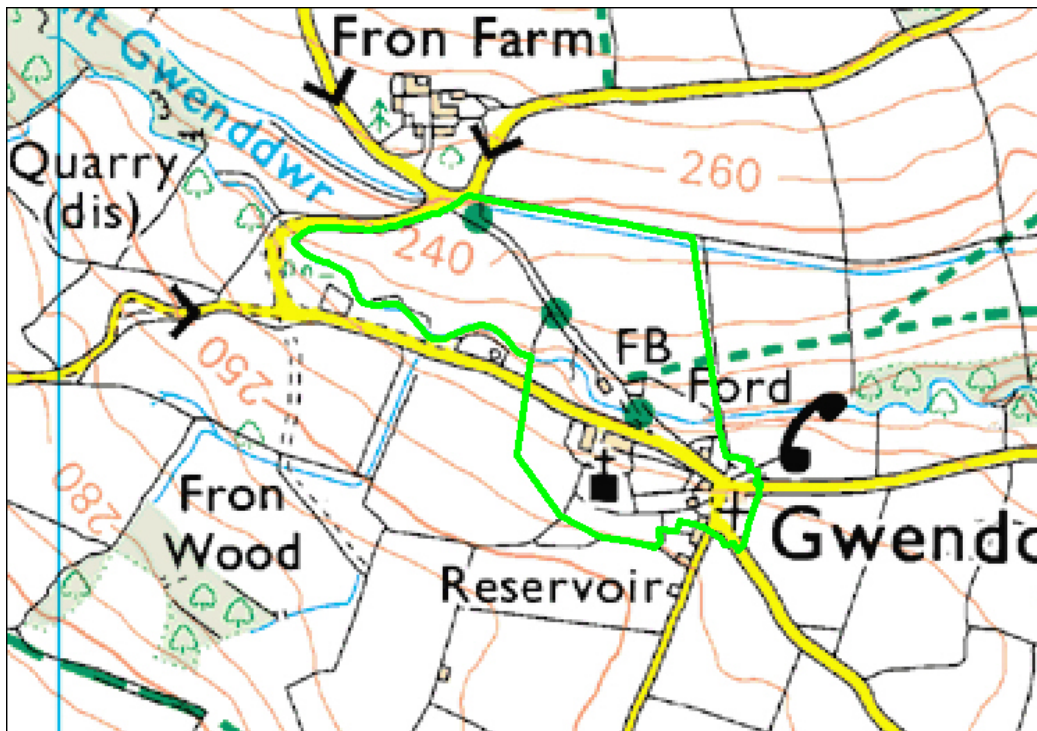
The site of the medieval grange (2917) has not been identified but it could have been close to the present church. Its mill, too, has tentatively been located by the stream about 100m to the north-west of the church, again without any supporting evidence. A better case can be made for a set of earthworks further downstream which are associated with a leat.

The field immediately to the east of the present churchyard (but wholly within the 'larger' enclosure) contains a number of building platforms (2919) which could be associated with a secular settlement around the church.

Two fields facing the church on the north side of Nant Gwenddwr contain extensive earthworks which are now a scheduled ancient monument (3913/SAM B168). At least ten platforms create a nucleated group of house sites indicative of a deserted village settlement, and are accompanied by tracks and lynchets. On this evidence, Gwenddwr was considerably larger in the medieval period than it is today. Locally these earthworks are believed to be the site of the 'priory', but this seems unlikely.

Traces of ridge and furrow cultivation can be seen to the east (2920) and the west (2921 and 2922) of Gwenddwr and could represent the remains of a medieval or later field system for the village, though the date of ridge and furrow cultivation is difficult to determine.

In summary, the historic settlement core of Gwenddwr comprises two elements, a putative oval church enclosure straddling the stream and a nucleated group of earthworks representing deserted settlement immediately to the north. There is as yet no evidence of medieval activity adjacent to the oval enclosure, though this will only emerge from archaeological excavation, and the location of the medieval grange also remains hypothetical.



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