CPAT Report No 1142

Historic settlements in Flintshire

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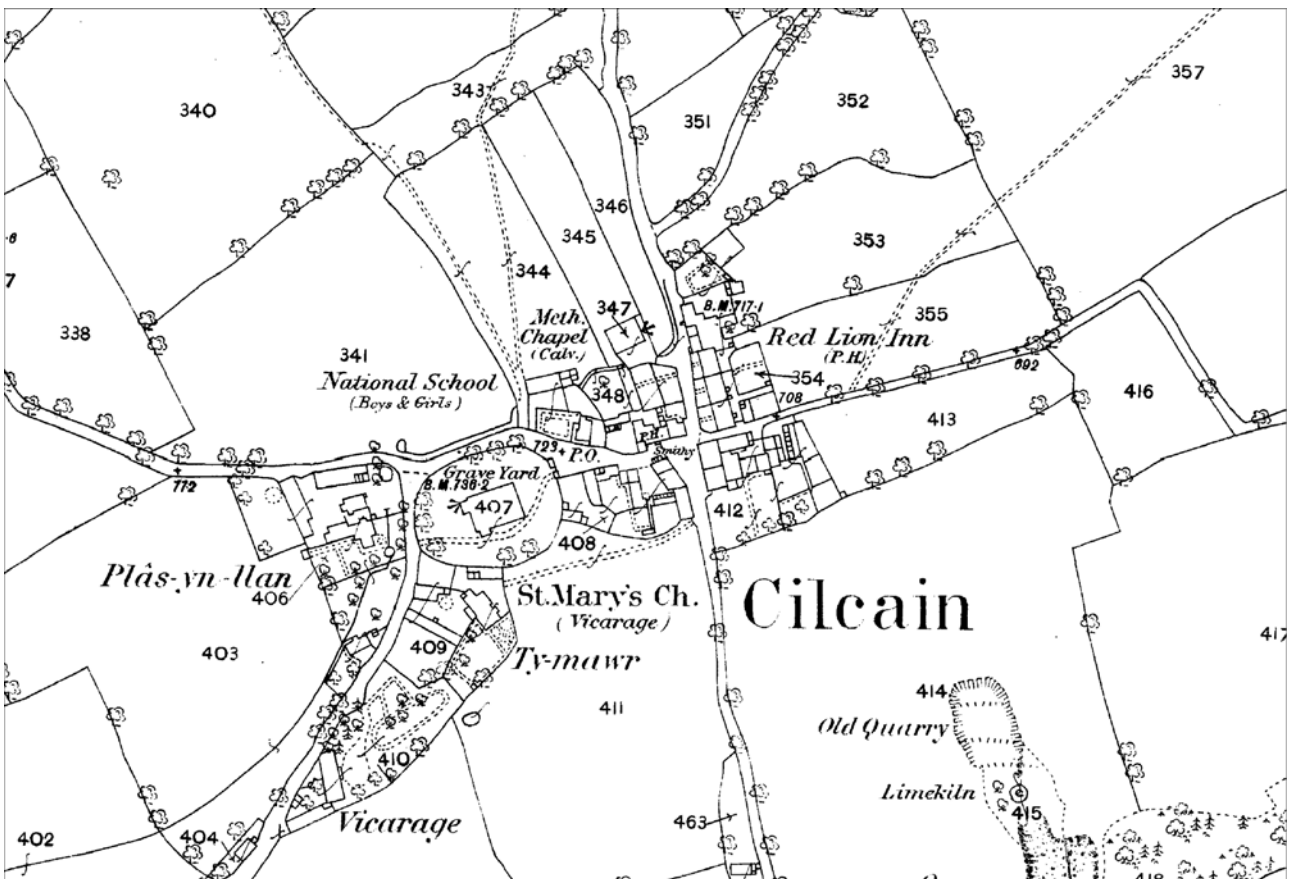
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Historic settlements in Flintshire

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Report for Cadw

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The historic settlements of Flintshire
An introduction

Background

Eighteen years ago the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust compiled assessments of the historic settlements of Delyn Borough and Alyn and Deeside, two of the districts of the then county of Clwyd, on behalf of Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. These were two of several such assessments for the local authority areas of eastern and north-eastern Wales and ultimately ten reports were completed between 1992 and 1995, embracing the entire region for which CPAT had and retains a remit.

The imperative that underpinned these surveys was committed to paper for the first time when Brecknock Borough was studied in 1993, it being expressed in the following terms:

> It has long been recognised that development within town and village alike [might] disturb or obliterate significant information about the past, but a suitable response to a specific building development or other permanent land use change has usually been instigated, if at all, on an ad hoc basis. A more structured approach to the understanding of historic settlements and the preservation and management of this fragile resource is required. This has been given a greater urgency by the publication in 1991 of the Welsh version of the Planning and Policy Guidance Note: Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16 Wales). This emphasises the responsibilities of Local Planning Authorities in the conservation of the archaeological heritage and confirms that archaeological remains are a material consideration when determining planning applications (Martin and Walters 1993, 3).

Three principal objectives of the Brecknock Borough study were defined at that time, and were equally applicable to the later studies:

> i) to produce a general picture of historic settlement in the area,
> ii) to identify, in as far as the evidence allows, those areas within the historic settlements that could be termed archaeologically sensitive, in order to assist in the day-to-day and long-term planning processes initiated by the local authority, and
> iii) to define areas of potential archaeological significance where developers might be required to undertake an archaeological evaluation as part of the planning process.

The individual village histories were never intended for publication, but their contents were absorbed into the Sites and Monuments Record (now the Historic Environment Record) where they could be accessed and recycled, usually without any acknowledgement to their source, in others' reports.

There is no need to stress that in the two decades since those reports on Flintshire's towns and villages was circulated to a relatively small number of interested organisations, there have been changes, and we would hope improvements, to our collective perception of the emergence, development and in some instances collapse of historic settlements in the border counties and more specifically in Flintshire.

Firstly, a series of Cadw-funded site-condition studies have appeared which directly or indirectly have had a bearing on settlement studies. The historic churches survey (1995-99), the early medieval ecclesiastical sites survey (2001-04) and even the deserted medieval rural settlement survey (1996-2001) have all played a part in enhancing our understanding of settlement patterns and development in eastern Wales, as have some rather more specific and detailed ground surveys such as those of village earthworks in Brecknock (1993) and Radnorshire (1996), though none unfortunately for Flintshire.

Secondly, there are the results that have accrued from client-funded works on development sites – whether excavation, evaluation, watching brief or building recording – as a result of local authorities implementing PPG16 and, from 2002, the guidelines contained in Planning Policy Wales.

Thirdly, there are recently published studies which have transformed our thinking on certain topics. Most notable in this context are the place-name studies by Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan (2007), the first two volumes of the early medieval inscribed stones corpus prepared by Nancy Edwards, Mark Redknap and John Lewis (2007) and Richard Suggett's Houses and History in the March of Wales. Radnorshire 1400-1800 published by the Welsh Royal Commission in 2005. Neither of these last two is directly pertinent to Flintshire but both illustrate the quality of some of the work that has recently been completed or is in progress in the Principality.

Finally though in some ways the least tangible of the inputs is the ever-improving perception and appreciation of settlement development and the patterns that are fostered in east Wales, as a result of accumulated expertise, and the accessing of research from both other regions of Wales and from England. This doesn't normally manifest itself in publications, although the writer's paper, co-authored with Wyn Evans (2009) on clas churches and their landscapes is an exception.

In 2010 CPAT felt that the time had come to re-examine the pictures of its historic settlements, fifteen to twenty years on from when the initial studies were completed. In a general sense, various questions had been raised. Had developer-funding in advance of the potential destruction or damage to the cultural heritage had much of an effect and if so where? Had our knowledge and appreciation of the historic settlements in the region markedly improved in the last fifteen to twenty years? And in a departure from the practice in the early 1990s when the Internet was little more than an unfulfilled dream, could we successfully disseminate that information authoritatively so that it could be accessed digitally to satisfy the increasing number of people who search our website? There are several hundred historic settlements in eastern Wales and it was not possible to examine them all in a single exercise. The former local authority areas of Brecknock Borough and Radnorshire were selected to initiate the programme in 2010-11 and this has been followed with studies of Montgomeryshire and Flintshire in 2011-12. We hope to complete the remaining areas over the next two years.

Methodology and presentation
The 1994/5 reports. A pattern for each report was established in 1992 comprising a report which covered a minimum of one A4 page of text and in some instances, depending on the size and interest of the settlement involved, three or four pages. The report considered, under four sub-headings, the geographic location of the settlement, the known history of its origins and development, the buildings and archaeology that were integral elements of the settlement, and finally a set of recommendations for further work.

Accompanying each settlement study was an Ordnance Survey map-based depiction of the settlement showing scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, known archaeological features and earthworks, areas which it was felt at the time should be preserved in situ, other areas that should be evaluated in advance of development, and a boundary line drawn around the historic settlement as it was then recognised, in other words the perceived historic core of the town or village.

Those early reports also contained as annexes a copy of the descriptive brief for the preparation of the study and another of a draft paper on archaeology and the planning process in Powys

The 2012 report. After various discussions the configuration of both the text layout and the accompanying map have been revised, to take account of changing circumstances and current requirements.

The baseline information – the settlement name, the national gird reference and the primary record number that links the settlement (as well as its individual elements) to the Historic Environment Record – have necessarily remained the same, although the height above sea level and the prefix PRN have been dropped.

The geographic location has been retained, as has the section on history, now renamed 'history of development'. More change can be seen in the section formerly headed 'buildings and archaeology' which has been altered to 'the heritage to 1750'. This alteration results from two considerations. Firstly, it is becoming increasingly commonplace to refer to the cultural heritage and cultural heritage assets, convenient collective terms that embrace not only below and above-ground archaeology, and buildings, but also historic landscape (and townscape) elements that did not necessarily get the recognition that they warrant in the former terminology. Cultural heritage is seen as a useful shorthand descriptive term for everything that we are concerned with here. Secondly, a decision was taken to end the study at 1750, bringing it into line with Cadw's terminal date for the concurrent scoping programme of medieval and early post-medieval monument scheduling enhancement. 1750 to 1760 is often seen as a starting date for the Industrial Revolution, even if its full 'flowering' did not occur in Wales for another fifty years. Equally importantly, however, it was during the later 18th century and a little beyond that, some settlements saw marked development with a concomitant increase in the number of buildings, and the diminishing significance in the forms of evidence that are significant to the archaeologist. This is not to downplay the significance of the buildings that date from the later 18th and 19th centuries, nor to infer that settlements that contain large numbers of such structures are not historic, rather it is a commentary on the shift in the nature of the evidence that is available to us.

This report has also tried to adopt a more rigorous approach to the presentation of the data, whether it be on archaeological sites, buildings or the townscape. It would be easy to write protracted descriptions of some buildings such as churches or earthwork complexes, or even in some instances the discoveries from development-led evaluations. The regurgitation of much detail, it was felt, would not necessarily be particularly useful to the general reader, and indeed might act as a deterrent. The inclusion of PRN numbers will allow the researcher or enthusiast to follow up individual leads in the regional Historic Environment Record should they wish, but what is offered here is a concise text covering as many issues as are currently known without over-elaboration on any one of them.

Finally, the section of recommendations has been removed. This, it should be admitted, is in part a pragmatic decision based on the realisation that some of the original recommendations covering standard issues such as the importance of consultation with the archaeological curator, the need for watching briefs and evaluations, and the like were compiled at a time when PPG16 was new, consultation practice was yet to be regularised, and the importance of the cultural heritage resource in our towns and villages had in some areas yet to be appreciated by at least some local authority planners. This situation has changed, and the importance of the cultural heritage is now largely accepted at local government level. It is pragmatic, however, for less satisfactory reasons. In an ideal world the recommendation for Halkyn that a survey be conducted to identify the relict earthworks of the former village would have been followed up and completed at some point over the last seventeen years. That these aims have not been achieved is less a comment on the validity of the recommendation, more on the limited resources that are available for surveying and research: it is unrealistic to assume that this is going to change in the foreseeable future.

There have also been some modifications to the plans that accompany the texts. The depiction of designated archaeological sites (scheduling) and buildings (listing) has been left out, for we are conscious of the fact that it is entirely the prerogative of Cadw and/or the local authority to define these sites in cartographic form, and that the reader requiring information on the extent of a designation should approach the appropriate authority for that information. Furthermore, the number and extent of designated sites within any given settlement will change through time, and assuming

that these maps have a currency measured in years, there is the potential for misleading a reader because the situation could have changed.

The definition of the historic core has also been modified, taking more account of existing boundaries in order to lessen any potential contention over whether a particular spot lies inside or outside the historic core as we perceive it. We would stress that the core boundary as defined is not an immutable perimeter, but is simply an estimate and a guide based on an assessment of the existing evidence by the writer as to where earlier settlement may once have existed.

Dropped too is the zonation of areas for evaluation in advance of development. In 1992, defining such areas was a useful guide to planners as to where archaeological intervention was most needed, but there is a potential conflict between the depiction of one or two such areas on a map on the one hand and the definition of the historic core on the other. If for whatever reason, an area within an historic core envelope is not highlighted for evaluation, this could be taken as an indication that the area would not require further assessment in the event of a proposed development. Rather we must work on the assumption that any development within an historic core could be a candidate for an evaluation, depending of course on the nature of the development itself, but that it should be the development control officer at CPAT who makes that decision, based on his own professional judgment.

More contentious perhaps is the decision to omit the identification of blocks of land defined as 'areas for preservation in situ', another facet of the 1992 survey. Where such areas are already statutorily designated within an historic settlement, their preservation is a given and no problem arises. However, in some cases in the past a decision that an area ought to be preserved has been taken on the basis of a rather superficial assessment of its worth, rather than on a detailed analysis of what is there. If, then, at a planning level a field containing earthworks is going to be preserved it needs to be based on rigorously defined evidence that will stand up to objective scrutiny, and this requires a detailed record that is rarely accessible through a report of this nature.

One final aspect to clarify is that the historic core envelope now defines only those areas within which there is the likelihood of settlement, by which we mean dwellings and their curtilages. The setting of any settlement will have been the surrounding landscape that was farmed and utilised from it, and potentially could spread over several square kilometres. Defining its fields, its pastures and its woodlands will be a considerable task, and its success cannot be guaranteed. Vital though it is to an understanding of that settlement, the inclusion of the setting within the historic core cannot be advocated. It requires a different level of zoning.

The original study of the two districts within Clwyd listed 35 settlements. The current survey covers 20. Omitted are settlements such as Bagillt, Greenfield, Llanfynydd and Oakenholt that reflect only post-1750 developments, and places such as Higher Shotton and Picton which though having a long history going back well into the Middle Ages, the latter even appearing in Domesday Book, were, as far as we can tell, manors centred on a single farm rather than nucleated settlements.

An overview of Flintshire's historic settlements
The categorisation of towns and villages is a frequently difficult and sometimes impossible task, based as it is on sparse and often sporadic evidence. Form and shape, or more correctly termed morphology, provides guidance on planned towns and villages, the presence of older buildings can offer clues as to whether there was some level of nucleation in a settlement in the Tudor era, though rarely before that time. Both of these characteristics provide positive evidence that can be relied on. In contrast, negative evidence used to support a particular contention, may or may not be reliable. There is no immediate way of knowing. Overall, the number of settlements where we have positive evidence for the emergence and development is outweighed by those underpinned by negative evidence alone. Hence the categorisation below is little more than provisional, and is likely to stay so for the foreseeable future.

Planned settlements
There are five settlements which reveal elements of deliberate planning, and they account for all of Flintshire's major historic towns. Caerwys and Flint are both classic examples of planned settlements. Indeed the latter has been cited as the most symmetrical example of the new towns that were laid out in medieval Britain, and there is some irony with Flint in that other than its pattern of streets, there is nothing to signal its remarkable origins. Caerwys is an altogether better exemplar of urban planning. Mold too has a planned layout based on the T-form (cf Machynlleth), though this was not recognised for what it was until recently, and Caergwrle has a grid pattern. Both are regularly patterned settlements set out below their respective castles. There is more ambiguity with the fifth town, Holywell. In plan, High Street with its narrow tenement plots running off at right angles, appears a convincing candidate, and the fact that the parish church is several hundred metres away and lower down the valley is not significant (the parish church for Caergwrle is at Hope on the far bank of the Alyn). But there are virtually no pre-Georgian buildings on High Street and seemingly little documentary, cartographical or archaeological evidence to support its early creation – while deliberate planning in the medieval era seems plausible it has yet to be proved.

Caergwrle	Flint	Mold
Caerwys	Holywell	

Nucleated village settlements
Nucleated settlements are well attested in some areas of east Wales, but in Flintshire they are more difficult to pin down. It is reasonable to assume some degree of nucleation at places like Halkyn and Northop in the Tudor era, though it can only be a surmise that the grouping of houses might have commenced in the Middle Ages.

Halkyn	Guilsfield	Llansilin
Northop	Llanrhaeadr	

Castle settlements
These have been defined in other historic settlement reports as hamlets or villages that have grown up in the shadow of a castle though without displaying the attributes of deliberate planning. The one settlement that might be accorded this label is Hawarden which reportedly held borough status and had been granted a market. Post-medieval landscape changes make it difficult to appreciate the true form of the settlement in, say, the Elizabethan era, but it must be assumed that there was some level of nucleation and that it was originally the presence of the castle that led to the growth of settlement. Had Ewloe Castle had a longer history, it too might have acted as a focus for settlement. But other than an unconfirmed story that Edward I established a small colony here, nothing suggests that dwellings grouped around the castle.

Hawarden

Church settlements
In some parts of east Wales, church settlements top the list of site types in numerical terms. Not so in Flintshire. Only two places – Nercwys and Treuddyn – have a discernible pattern of settlement in recent times that suggest they were little more than isolated churches or chapels for much of their history.

Nercwys	Treuddyn

Settlements of uncertain nature
There are some settlements that currently defy categorisation: the evidence that is available to us is insufficient to place them in any of the groups already discussed, although in all likelihood they will ultimately be classed either as small nucleated villages or as church settlements. But it seems improbable that further documentary research or topographic analysis will resolve the problem; only archaeological excavation will throw any light on the matter. Cilcain could have

seen some grouping of dwellings either around the church or the crossroads just to the east in the medieval or Tudor periods, but equally the concentration of settlement could have occurred in more recent times. Similarly, the origins and development of Gwaenysgor, Hope, Llanasa, Nannerch, Trelawnyd, Whitford and Ysceifiog are obscure. Most probably had churches in the pre-Conquest era, but there is no way of knowing whether there were houses around these churches in the Middle Ages.

Cilcain	Gwaenysgor	Hope
Llanasa	Nannerch	Trelawnyd
Whitford	Ysceifiog	