

Old Radnor

SO 250590
16185

Introduction

Old Radnor backs against the western flank of Old Radnor Hill and overlooks the Walton Basin to the north. The church surmounts a spur that projects slightly from the main hill mass and the houses that make up the settlement have developed around it. Steep descents to the Basin on the north give way to more gentle slopes to the south-west. Kington in Herefordshire is less than 6km to the south-east and the English border is no more than 2km away.

This brief report examines Old Radnor's 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).



Old Radnor village, photo 04-C-0177, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

Old Radnor is recorded as *Raddrenove* in Domesday Book in 1086. It signifies 'the red ridge' or 'bank'. The 'Old' prefix was applied to distinguish the settlement when New Radnor was established, and it first appears in a document of 1253. The site is referred to in Welsh as Pen Craig meaning 'top (of the) rock' but the earliest occurrence of this term is in the mid-15th century.

Lands belonging to Old Radnor church were reputedly acquired by the See of Worcester as early as 887. Certainly various strands of evidence, particularly the configuration of the churchyard and the remarkable font within the building, point to beginnings in the early medieval era. There is a possibility too, that it became a *clas* church and functioned as a mother church for the region.

It has been suggested that when the Normans reached the area they found a church dedicated to an obscure late 6th-century Welsh saint, Ystyffan, and that the dedication was subsequently anglicised to St Stephen.

A theory that the settlement developed as a borough (5234), a predecessor to New Radnor, should probably be dismissed. There are few physical traces to support what are ambivalent documentary references.

In the mid-19th century, the settlement seems to have consisted solely of the church accompanied by the Harp Inn and no more than three cottages. Even allowing for the earthwork evidence around Stockwell Farm (see below), Old Radnor does not have the appearance of a properly nucleated settlement in the past, but rather one where settlement was spread out along the slope.

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Stephen (20111; Grade I listing) has a nave, chancel, north and south aisles both with chapels, a south porch and west tower, and is remarkable for its contents. The church was burnt by Glyndŵr in 1401. The nave and perhaps the chancel and tower are 15th century, with 16th-century roofs and windows throughout. A single capital survives from its 12th-century predecessor. Internally there are many features of interest: a font carved from an erratic boulder and tentatively attributed to the 8th century, which has been claimed, perhaps not accurately as the oldest piece of church furniture in England and Wales; a 13th-century tomb slab; some medieval encaustic floor tiles; a 15th-century screen, stalls and some glass of the same date; an early 16th-century organ case, the earliest surviving in the British Isles; a medieval or slightly later vestment chest; and several 18th-century monuments.

The churchyard (16297) is large, sub-circular, and noticeably raised around its southern perimeter. The original course on the west is still visible as a substantial scarp inside the present stone-walled boundary, and this scarp continues outside the stone wall on the north-east, curving round before fading out in front of the Harp Inn. It thus appears that the original church enclosure has been truncated at its northern end.

Opposite the church and within the village is a moated site (374; SAM Rd051), its ditch up to 2.6m deep, but partially destroyed on the west. The entrance may have been on the north. For reasons that are unclear Lewis saw this as the site of an 'ancient religious house, supposed to have been a nunnery'. However, a terrier of 1607 declares it to be a moated parsonage, and there is now a presumption against calling it a 'castle'.



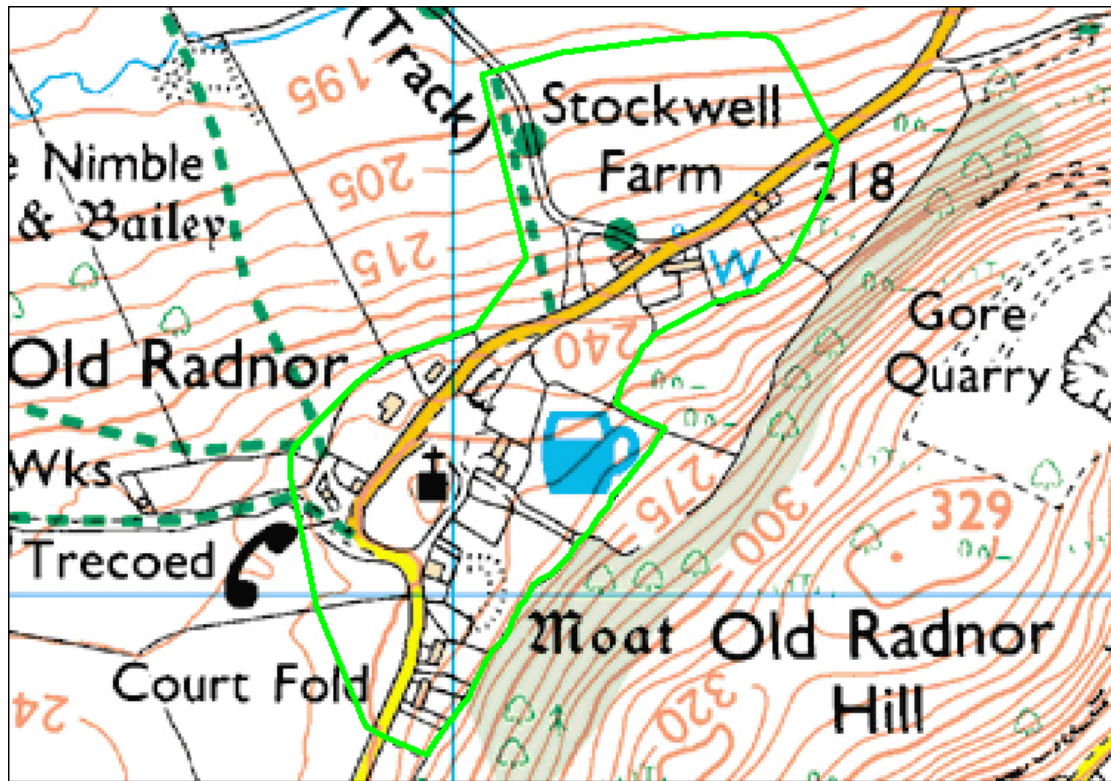
Old Radnor church, photo CS04-007-0001, © CPAT, 2011

Just to the north-west of the village and on the valley floor lies Castle Nimble (360; SAM Rd046), an unconvincing motte with a surrounding ditch, and a bailey to the east. As Paul Remfry has pointed out it is a peculiar site and one whose true purpose has yet to be established.

Below Stockwell Farm, 300m north-east of the church, are linear earthworks, enclosing at least four and possibly six building platforms and also including holloways and other boundary features (5296; OS plots 1111 and 1339). To the south-west of the farm, ridge and furrow (16267; OS plot 1121) shows on aerial photos though this is less clearly defined on the ground.

Earthworks (16298; OS plot 7900) are also visible from the air and on the sloping ground to the south-west of the church. They include one or perhaps two building platforms and a possible trackway, which from its position could be the original extension of the road traversing the hillside from the north-east and may link Harpton Court with the village. This 'track' appears to continue in a southerly direction but needs to be confirmed by further fieldwork. A scoop at the base of Old Radnor Hill just to the east of the moat, may also be a house platform (16299; OS plot 0006).

The Harp Inn (16044; Grade II listing) is reputedly of 17th-century type, a former cross-passage timber-framed house rebuilt in stone. Stockwell Farmhouse (16063; Grade II listing) may be 16th-century in origin, a re-fronted one-and-a half storey hall block with a 2-storey crosswing and later ranges to south and east.



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