

LLANSANTFFRAED

SO 1223 2350

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Introduction

Llansantffraed is located beside the A40 trunk road, on the eastern edge of the Usk valley, just over 9km south-east of Brecon. Beyond the main road the ground drops abruptly to the valley floor, while the church is set into the lower slopes of a hill that rises increasingly steeply to the ridge of Allt yr Esgair above.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llansantffraed 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 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. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The settlement is first encountered as *Lansefred* in c.1100, as *Lan San Friad* in the years between 1140 and 1150, as *Llansanffreit* in 1215 to 1222, as *Sancta Brigida* in the church taxation of 1254, as *Brydechurch* in 1310-11 and as *St Mary de Sancto Brigida* in 1476. It can reasonably be assumed that all of these references are specific to the church rather than the place. The dedicatee is the Irish St Brigid, who also appears as St Bride and in Welsh as Ffraid and Ffrêd. There seem to have been several saints of this name and there are no less than seventeen dedications to them in Wales. While Llansantffraed is the name given by the Ordnance Survey, Llansanffraid is the preferred Welsh rendering.

That this was an early medieval foundation seems certain, based on the dedication, the form of the churchyard and the location on the edge of a river valley. But nothing is known of its settlement history, and though it was termed a small village in 1675, the modern appearance and early 19th-century maps offer no evidence that might suggest that this was ever a nucleated community.

The heritage to 1750

St Ffraed's church was completely rebuilt in 1884-85, though its predecessor (from 1690) with a curious domed cap or cupola to its bell turret and a chancel roof higher than its nave counterpart is permanently recorded in a drawing prepared by the architect Stephen Williams before its demolition. Inside there are earlier funerary monuments from the late 17th century onwards and a late 13th-century font, as well as a weathered stoup in the porch.

The churchyard today has a broadly rectangular shape except for its curving south-easterly boundary. This has been modified in recent times for the late 19th-century Ordnance Survey map shows more of a curve to the north-eastern side and a map of 1817 implies more curvature on the north-west. Originally then, Llansantffraed had a relatively circular churchyard. It should also be noted that the churchyard contains the tomb of the 17th-century metaphysical poet, Henry Vaughan.

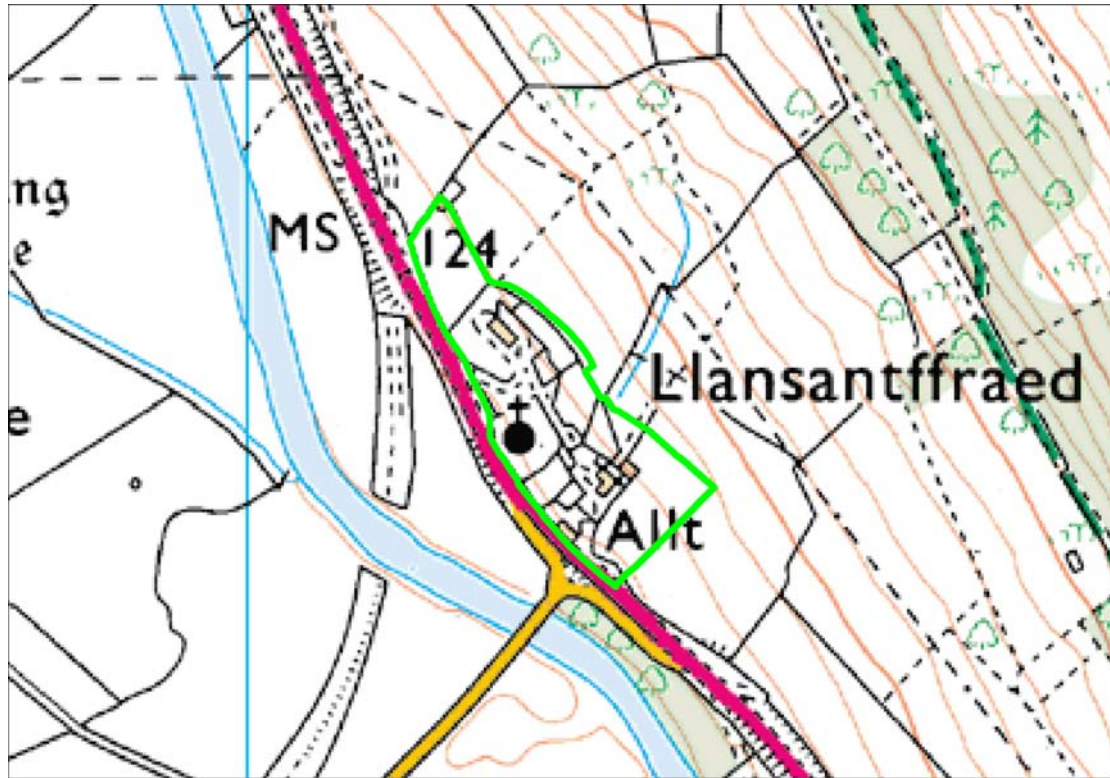
Llansantffraed House is thought to have had an 18th-century origin, but was extensively remodelled in the 19th century.



Llansantffraed, photo 05-c-0200 © CPAT, 2013

No obvious earthworks can be detected on the land adjacent to the church for much of the area has been landscaped or covered with buildings. In fields behind Llansantffraed House, further north, there are terraces that might repay more detailed examination in the future.

An archaeological assessment in 2007 linked to the improvement of the road junction immediately to the south of the church identified nothing of significance likely to be related to the settlement at Llansantffraed.



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