

LLECHFAEN

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Introduction

Llechfaen is a hamlet in what was the parish of Llanhamlach, about 3km to the east of Brecon and one kilometre north of the Usk. It occupies a south-facing hillside below what Lewis in the 19th century termed Allt Ronwy and is served only by meandering lanes though the Brecon by-pass sweeps past less than 700m away.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llechfaen 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 earliest version of the name yet to be traced comes towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, when in 1593 *Leghvaine* is recorded. In 1776 the surveyor Edward Thomas termed it *Llechfane*, and the only significant variation came in 1813 when it was referred to as *Llanhamlach-fan*. With *llech* signifying 'slate' or 'slab' and *maen* a stone, an obvious meaning would be a 'flat or recumbent stone', but other meanings are possible.

That there was a medieval nucleated settlement here is irrefutable. As late as the final quarter of the 18th century, there were still unenclosed open-field strips functioning around the hamlet and the chapel (see below) is also likely to have been of medieval origin. William Rees drawing on source material not readily available to us today felt able to name it and show the chapel on his great map of south Wales in the 14th century which he compiled in the early 1930s.

The estate map of 1776 shows around a dozen dwellings together with the ruins of the chapel.

The heritage to 1750

Nothing remains of the chapel at Llechfaen. It was a chapel of ease to Llanhamlach and is likely to have been founded in the Middle Ages, but by 1700 a part of it had collapsed and as noted above it was in ruins in 1776. A round-headed doorway in Upper Farm, adjacent to the chapel site, could have come from the building.

In earlier centuries the dwellings in the settlement lay along a single lane with the chapel and Upper Farm towards the northern end.

In 1776 there were the remnants of open fields to the north-east, east and south-east, and hints of enclosed strips to the west.



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