

PENCELLI

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Introduction

About 6km south-east of Brecon, Pencelli lies on the B4558 which runs along the south side of the Usk valley, the castle occupying a triangular shelf of higher ground that projects into the valley and which the canal swings around. To the south the ground rises gently and then more steeply into the Brecon Beacons.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Pencelli 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 name means the 'end or head of a grove'. *Kastell peñ kelli* is documented for the year 1215 (in a later copy of c.1400). Other versions such as *Penkelly* (1233) and *Penkethly* (1310-11) could refer to the lordship of the same name rather than the castle and any associated settlement.

There is no church here – it lay within the ecclesiastical parish of Llanfeugn – and it is the castle that appears to have been the sole stimulus for settlement. Pencelli Castle is documented from 1215, but this is simply because it was recorded as being captured (by the English at this time). An earlier earth and timber fortification from the late 11th or early 12th century seems likely, its builder, a Baskerville, being one of the nobles who supported Bernard de Neumarché in his drive into Brycheiniog. Ralph de Mortimer may have been responsible for a major phase of construction in the second half of the 13th century, and in between these dates it seems to have passed from English hands to Welsh ones and back again. It was the centre of a sub-lordship, functioning too as a manorial centre.

Of the surrounding settlement which lay within the ecclesiastical parish of Llanfeugan, little is known but it appears to have been termed 'Castro' in 1675 when it was classed as a 'small village'.

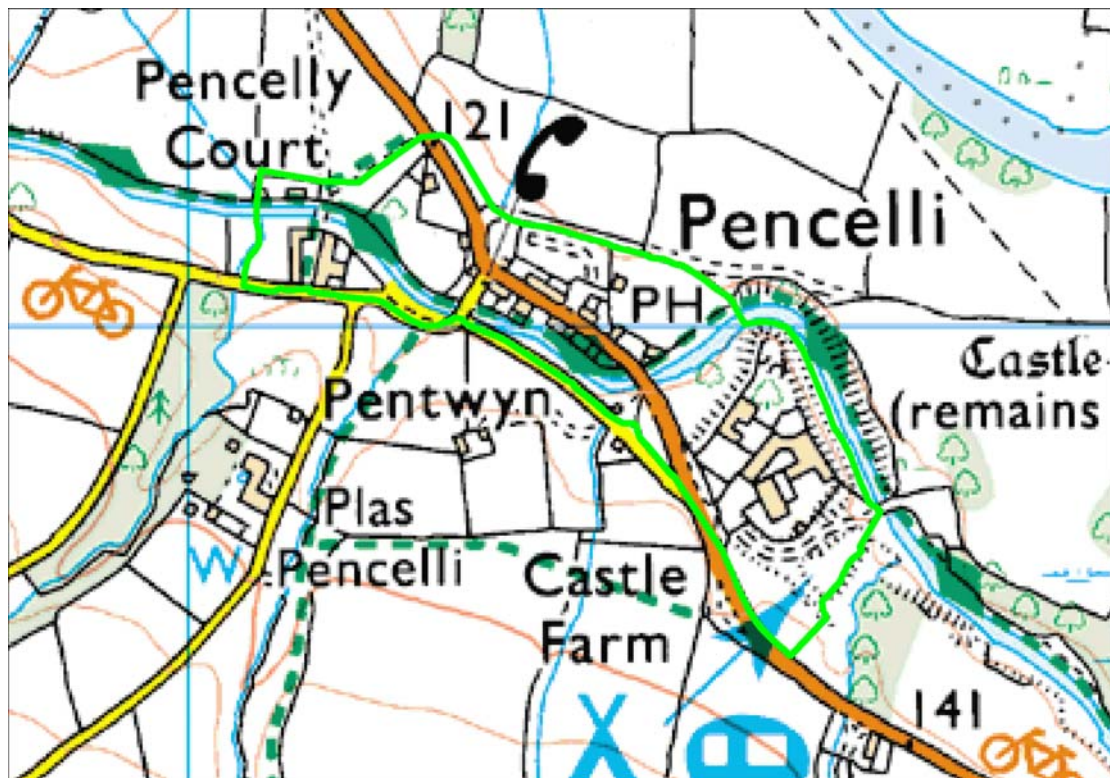
The heritage to 1750

Pencelli Castle consists of an earthwork complex and a few masonry remains. Considerable destruction of the castle appears to have occurred since 1741 when the Bucks produced an illustration of the ruins. A mound of material exists in the northern corner which is considered

to be a rectangular keep (rather than a motte as suggested in the past) and there was a twin-towered gatehouse set in a curtain wall though all this has now gone. The earthworks indicate two baileys or wards. Within the perimeter the listed farmhouse has a datestone of 1583 and evidence of the re-use of architectural elements from the castle. There is a record of a free chapel dedicated to St Leonard within the walls. What is absent for the castle is an interpretative plan.

A settlement developed below the castle on level ground to the north-west. Its time of origin cannot be established with any certainty, yet with two parallel streets running on a north-west to south-east alignment, two more closing their ends, and the interior of the rectangle so formed being divided into strips (as shown on 19th-century maps and interrupted only by the canal) this has all the hallmarks of a small plantation, a deliberately created settlement of medieval date. Within it the only building of any antiquity is the Royal Oak, an inn thought to be from the 18th century. The presence too of a gentry home, Pencelly Court, beyond the western end of the planned settlement, has parallels elsewhere in Brecknock, its barn of two periods, from the 17th and 18th centuries, the byre from the same general time, while the house itself is of 17th-century date and carries a datestone of 1691 on a chimney.

No obvious earthworks have been recorded in and around Pencelli but the pasture field south of Menascin might repay closer examination, though the ridge and furrow within it recorded from aerial photography is more likely to relate to the orchard that was present in the 19th century.



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