

DEFYNNOG

SN 9260 2790

15953

Introduction

Defynnog lies on the A4067, less than 1km south of Sennybridge and 12km to the west of Brecon. Even today it has twin foci, with the church and accompanying buildings on the hill, and at a lower level to the south further buildings grouped beside the bridge over the Senni. The present road follows a modern course, but the earlier road is apparent in the surviving street pattern.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Defynnog 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 require modification 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 this name is *Deuannoc* which appeared in the years between 1202 and 1214. In the ecclesiastical taxation of 1254 it is given as *Devennoc* and later versions all show generally slight deviations in spelling. Combining a personal name *Dyfwyn* and the suffix *og* the name means ‘the territory belonging to Dyfwyn’. Antiquarian speculation that the name somehow derives from the church dedication to Cynog appears now to be wide of the mark.

A church almost certainly emerged here in the early medieval era (as evidenced by the dedication, two inscribed stones and its topographical location), and it is not impossible that Defynnog was the mother church for the area although a strong case for this has yet to be made.

The Little Forest, a hunting preserve in the Middle Ages contiguous with the great forest of Brecknock that extended over much of the western Brecon Beacons, was known on occasions as the forest of Defynnog; and it has been claimed too that Defynnog was a small borough in the 14th century. But while the former is irrefutable, the latter belief has yet to be substantiated and indeed may be little more than a myth. Thus the idea of a nucleated settlement developing at Defynnog in the Middle Ages though attractive has as yet little to support it.

The earliest map of Defynnog (other than Ogilby’s road map of 1675 which simply depicted the church) was prepared by Edward Thomas in 1780, and may be less an accurate portrayal, more a stylistic depiction of the village. In addition to the church, parsonage and churchyard cross (now gone), it showed nine houses and at least seems to confirm that even in the 18th

century there were two foci, one around the church, the other down by the river, though the gap between them was perhaps blurred on Thomas' map.

By the mid-19th century it was reported as one of only thirteen nucleated settlements in Breconshire.

The heritage to 1750

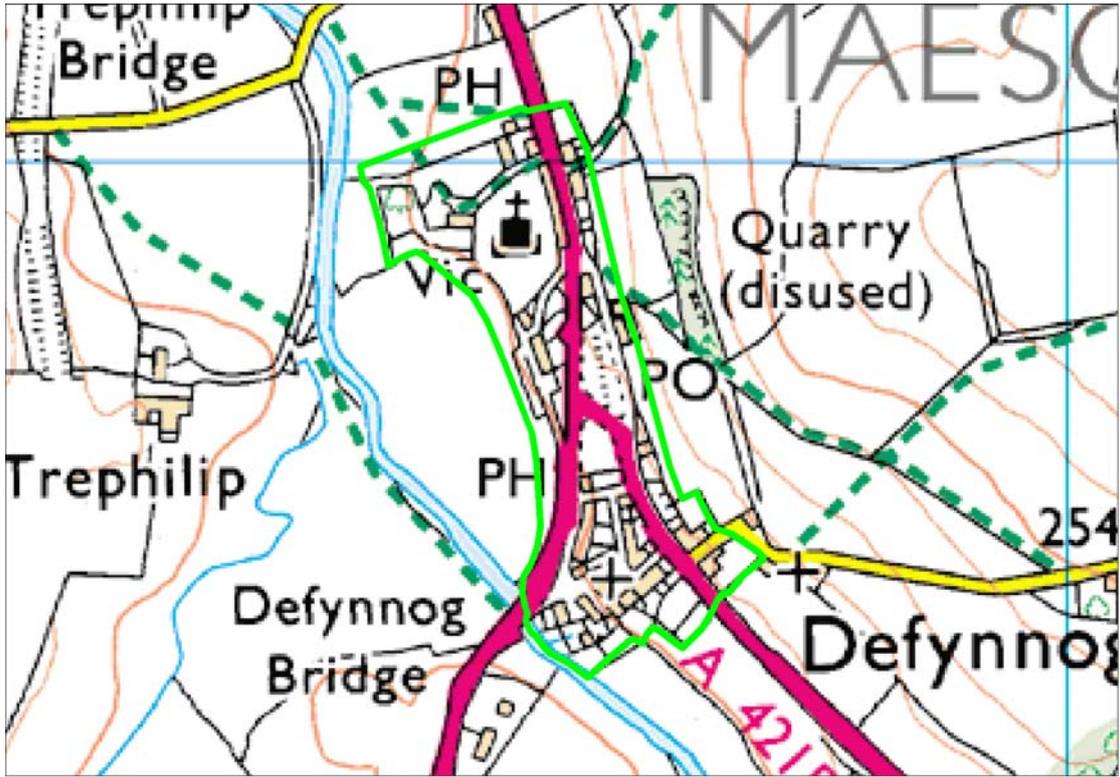
St Cynog's church dates in the main from 1500 with the tower attributable to the late 15th century, though there are uncertainties about the sequence of development. It has also been argued in the past that the north wall of the nave contains masonry and a window that may have survived from a pre-Norman church, but this is not convincing. An 11th-century date was formerly attributed to the font which it was claimed carried a Runic inscription, but this has now been authoritatively dismissed as a confection, a post-medieval bowl, perhaps from the time of Charles II's restoration, set on top of a medieval font. The stoup in the church is crude and could be Norman. There is also a good range of 18th-century memorials. Most significantly for the origins of the church, a 5th- or early 6th-century pillar stone is housed in the porch with a later but still early-medieval ring cross incised on it, and another early stone with a ring cross (of 9th- or 10th-century date) is built into the tower.

The present form of the churchyard is a polygon influenced only in part by the topography. But the southernmost portion is evidently a 19th-century extension and a more curvilinear shape around the southern perimeter is discernible on the mid-century tithe map.

Defynnog as noted above has two obvious foci, around the church and 200m to the south on the east bank of Afon Senni. Though the majority of listed buildings clustered around the church are not of any age, it is likely on topographical grounds that this was the original focus of Defynnog. The irregular pattern of streets by the bridge is curious and elsewhere might have elicited a belief in a medieval origin. It was classed as the village in 1838 and lies on ground of regular slope above the river. Consisting of a distinctive and attractive network of small lanes, some still cobbled, on the face of it there is nothing to point to a date earlier than the post-medieval era, particularly with street names so redolent of development during the Industrial Age.

Lying on the edge of this lower complex, Defynnog Mill, which is presumed to be on the site of the corn mill shown on late 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps, was one of six documented seigneurial mills established around the margins of the Great Forest of Brecknock by the 14th century. A document of 1651 recorded it as being near the church.

The listed vernacular buildings are, almost without exception, of 18th and 19th-century origin. But it should be noted that under the will of a London alderman five almshouses and a school room were erected in Defynnog in 1626. It had initially been assumed that these were rebuilt in the mid-19th century as the row of eight dwellings known as Church Row abutting the churchyard, but the modern listing description classes the latter as Tudor-style estate cottages dating from around 1840, and there a further group of three known as Bull Terrace to the south-east of the churchyard. Instead the almshouses are to be found in lower Defynnog on the High Street and were named as such on early Ordnance Survey maps. They were however rebuilt in the early 19th century. The Old Vicarage beyond the church was built or perhaps rebuilt in 1721.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2013. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.