

LLANFAES

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Introduction

Llanfaes is now a suburb of Brecon on the B4601 running westwards out of the town and to the south of the Usk. Geographically it is in the river valley and occupies level ground.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanfaes 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

Llanfaes can boast one of the earliest place-names in the county. In 817 (recorded in a document of c.1000 we read of (*Gueith*) Lannmaes, in c.1100 of *Landmais* and of *Launvays by Bregnogh* in 1280. The church dedication makes an appearance as *St David juxta Brecon* in 1535. Modern place-name authorities translate the name as the ‘church in open country’, and perhaps this is preferable to an alternative reading for *maes* of ‘open-field’ which would be an extremely early occurrence of this agricultural practice.

The place-name does however appear to point to the early medieval foundation of a church in this place, but one that cannot be confirmed by any other means.

The scale of medieval settlement around the church in the Middle Ages is unknown, though its proximity to Brecon encourages the assumption that the church will have acted as a focus for settlement at an early date, and the road past it was the main highway to Carmarthen for many centuries. In the middle of the 16th century the borough of Brecon appears to have been extended to take in the parish of St Davids. By the second half of the 17th century continuous housing edged the road as far as Llanfaes church and probably beyond, inferred from Ogilby’s road map. This is borne out by Edward Thomas’ estate map of 1780 and several slightly earlier manuscript maps which show a similar pattern, with on Thomas’ map dwellings well to the east of the church being classed as in ‘Llanvaes’ as indeed was Christ College. What also is also evident is that in the 18th century and probably earlier there was little in the way of housing beside the lane that ran south past the church.

The heritage to 1750

Of the medieval church at Llanfaes nothing survives, other than a sketch of c.1700. A new building was erected, apparently next to the old one, in 1859, and this in turn was replaced in

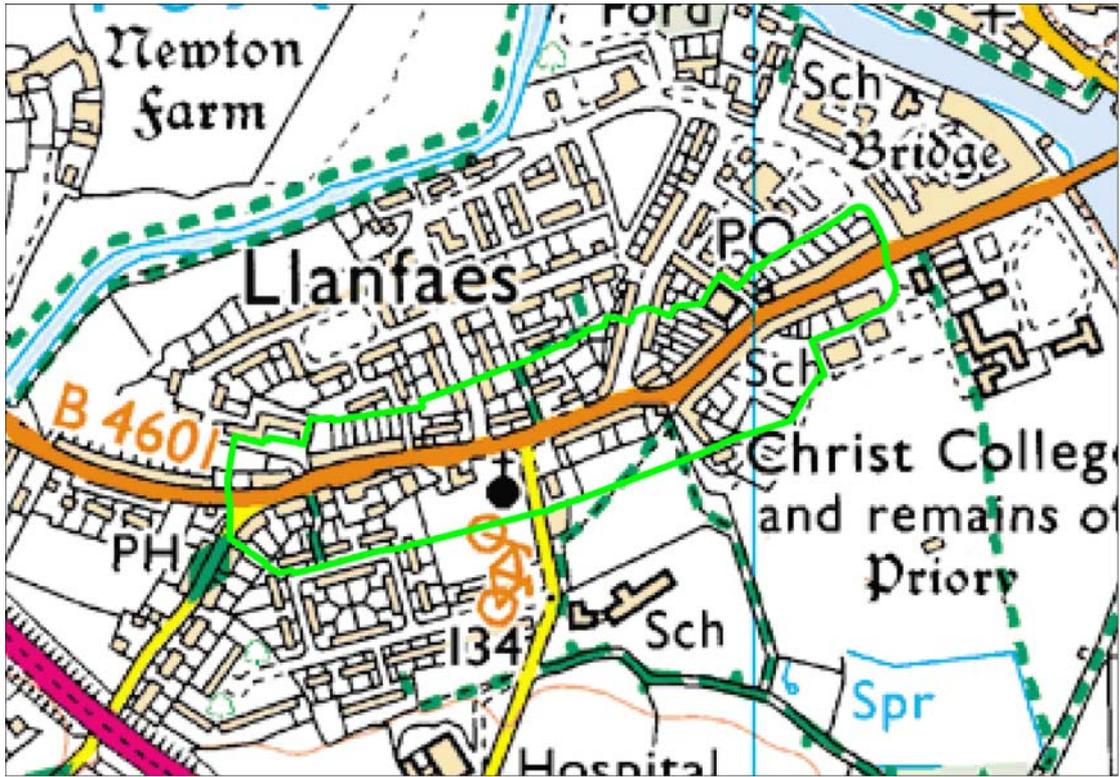
1923-5. The only medieval survival is the font and this has been refashioned, and there are some 18th-century memorials.



Llanfaes, photo 05-c-0167 © CPAT, 2013

The churchyard is rectangular with nothing to suggest an earlier boundary.

There are no buildings of any great age in the immediate vicinity of the church, the earliest perhaps being the Drovers' Arms further down Newgate Street which could have originated in the second half of the 18th century and Old Castle Farmhouse, formerly Penypentref, in Llandaff Row which is thought to be 18th-century but could have earlier features. The location of Llanfaes watermill mentioned on several occasions during the 15th century is not known.



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