

## LLANHAMLACH

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### *Introduction*

Llanhamlach lies on the A40 trunk road linking Abergavenny and Brecon, 5km south-east of the latter. The church and Peterstone Court lie on the edge of a river terrace above the Usk with the main settlement lying back from the river but on level ground beside the main road.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanhamlach 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](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).

### *History of development*

The name is first recorded in 1188 as *Lanhamelach* and as a range of names with very minor variations thereafter. More difficult is the meaning. Recent authorities have favoured 'the church of Anlach' whilst admitting that no such person is known from other sources to have existed around the time that the church is likely to have been founded.

The church is certainly an early medieval foundation with its curvilinear churchyard, dedication and its position on the bank of the Wye. To that can be added the likelihood that the cross-carved Moridic stone (see below) once stood upright within the enclosure. The church was established close to the Roman road that linked the forts at Abergavenny and Brecon – a Roman milestone was built into one of the Millbrook Farm buildings less than one kilometre to the north-west – and this was probably still usable in the early medieval era. Of its twin dedications that to St Peter could be late – it was first recorded in 1486 – while that to St Iltyd may reflect the belief, recorded in c.1191, that the holy man had utilised a chambered tomb in the parish for a hermitage.

The history of the settlement remains obscure. It was termed a 'small village' in 1675, but when the earliest estate map displaying the village was prepared in 1796, the layout it illustrated was not very different from today, with a few buildings including the rectory around the churchyard and a number of houses aligned along the main road opposite the turn to Peterstone Court. It is not possible to determine whether there was a medieval settlement around the church.



*Llanhamlach, photo 08-c-0104 © CPAT, 2013*

### ***The heritage to 1750***

The church, dedicated to St Peter and St Illtyd has a 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>-century tower and a 15<sup>th</sup>-century entrance to a porch that in line with the rest of the edifice was largely rebuilt in 1887. Housed within the building is an inscribed 10<sup>th</sup>- to 11<sup>th</sup>-century cross-carved stone known as the Moridic Stone, an early 14<sup>th</sup>-century stone effigy and a font of Perpendicular design, while 17<sup>th</sup>-century grave slabs are displayed in the porch, and another early medieval stone with decoration and of broadly the same date as the Moridic stone incorporated into the fabric of the tower.

The curvilinearity of the churchyard is discernible in the line of the surrounding wall on the south and east sides, reinforced by the internal embanking which is a feature of the enclosure. Whether portions of the churchyard have been shaved of the north and west sides in the distant past is unclear.

The Moridic Stone now in the church was recovered sometime after 1852 from the ruins of an earlier rectory where it had served as a window lintel. A suggestion that this was of medieval build are not convincing, though it was remarked by Samuel Lewis in 1833 that the Old Rectory contained re-used Norman architectural fragments (doorways, windows and decorated stonework). Another stone set on the verge of the A40, 300m north of the church, supposedly influenced the naming of Peterstone Court and is believed to have been erected during the Bronze Age. It may subsequently have been refashioned but any belief that it was another early medieval inscribed stone is misguided.

Peterstone Court, 200m north-west of the church, has a long history which supposedly goes back almost to the Norman Conquest. But the present building dates from 1741, and while its predecessor had been owned by the Walbeoffe family whose ancestor is believed to have been a follower of Bernard de Neufmarché, there is little to be said on what might have been here in the medieval era. Some of the earthworks around the court are considered to be relatively recent garden features, but there are others which from the air look to be of earlier date.

The Court and the Old Rectory apart, Llanhamlach church sits in isolation, although at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were a few cottages close by. Fields to the east and west of the church both contain surface irregularities though on cursory examination these appear to be natural rather than manmade. At what date dwellings started to emerge beside the main road is unclear, but a link with its development as a turnpike road in the 18<sup>th</sup> century seems plausible. As far as can be established, none of the houses have architectural elements that could be attributed an earlier 18<sup>th</sup>-century date. Further away from the settlement centre, Greenway House is a longhouse derivative of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

A range of cropmarks around the village has been identified from various aerial photographic sources over the last few years. It has not been possible to determine whether these relate to the historic settlement at Llanhamlach or represent earlier or perhaps minor agricultural features.



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