

LLYWEL

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Introduction

Llywel lies close to the A40 trunk road, 18km to the west of Brecon. The National Park boundary follows the northern edge of the churchyard so that all but a small part of the modern settlement lies within the park. The settlement occupies flat ground beside Nant Gwydderig, a tributary of the River Tywi. Low-lying and potentially marshy ground lies to the south while northward the land rises to the heights of Mynydd Epynt.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llywel 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

In 1239 this was described as the ‘church of the three saints’, known to be Dewi, Teilo and Llywel (though Samuel Lewis claimed the third was Padarn). The last of these appears to have been a 6th-century disciple of Dyfrig and Teilo, who is also remembered in a church in Monmouthshire. Early versions of the place-name recall this individual who supposedly founded a church in the 6th century close to the Roman road connecting the vale of Tywi and the Usk valley. The name is recorded as *Luhil* in the 12th century, as *Luel* in c.1200 and most recognisably as *llan yn llywel* in about 1180 (though the document in which the source was copied was from around 1400).

An early medieval foundation date for the church seems to be reasonably certain. In the 13th century the church passed to the bishops of St Davids and it presumably acquired its present dedication at that time. According to Giraldus Cambrensis, who at one stage was archdeacon of Brecon, the church was burnt down in an enemy raid, presumably in the late 12th or early 13th century.

The nature of any earlier settlement at Llywel prior to the late 18th century has yet to be established. But by that time there were several dwellings on the east and north sides of the churchyard, not dissimilar to today, but perhaps one or two more.

The heritage to 1750

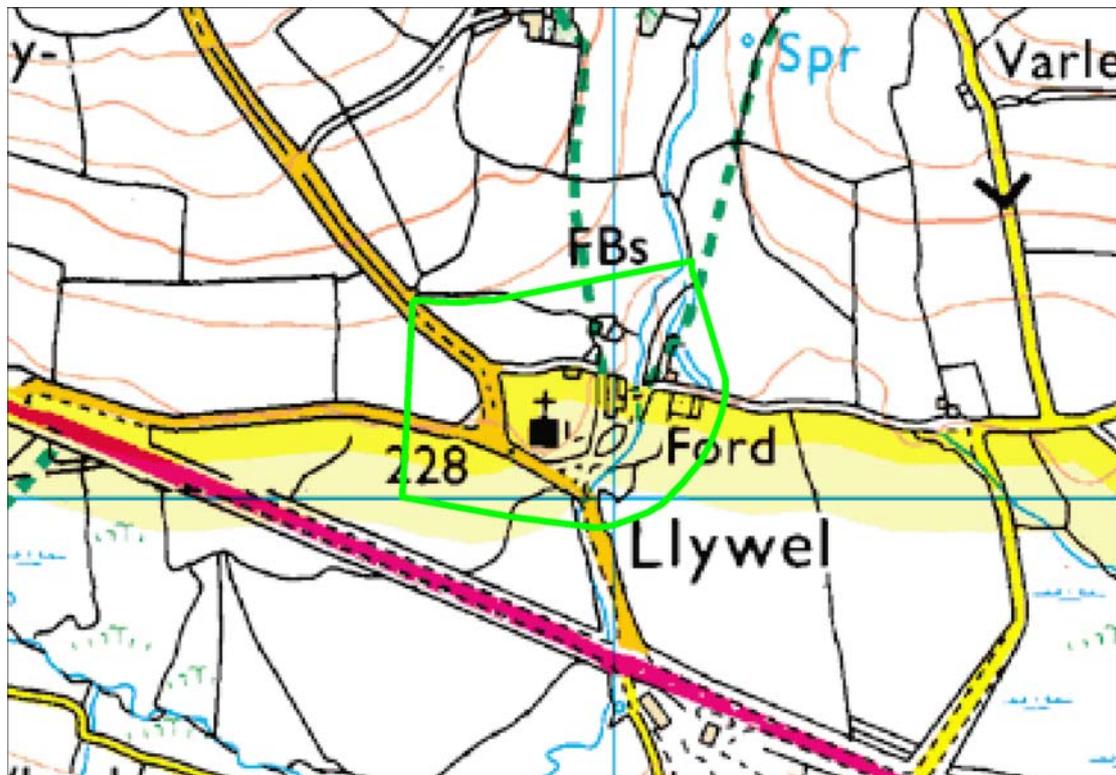
The present church of St David was constructed towards the end of the 15th century, though the tower may be at least a century earlier, and the chancel may be a little later than the nave.

Repairs were undertaken in 1869, with further work to the tower in 1877. The church contains a Latin and ogam-inscribed stone of the 5th and 6th centuries which was moved into the church sometime after its discovery in 1954 a couple of kilometres to the south near the Usk. A second stone, the so-called 6th-century Llywel Stone is represented by a plaster replica, the original being in the British Museum. There is also a now-disused font which has been attributed to the 11th or 12th century, re-used decorative woodwork from a 16th-century screen and a 17th-century vestry table.

The churchyard is D-shaped, though a little less so now than it was in the 19th century. Minor modifications to its layout have disguised the original sub-circular design.

It is evident from a cursory examination of the modern map that the original road from the west passed around the southern edge of the churchyard and then swung southwards, but it does not appear that there was a direct route to Trecastle until the turnpike road – now the A40 – was constructed in the 18th century. In front of the churchyard was a small green or common and the village pound there was still shown on modern maps until its accidental demolition by the water authority. The bridge across Nant Gwydderig approaching the village was replaced in 1813, the date of its predecessor unknown though it was repaired in 1772.

A few cottages surround the churchyard, the residue of a larger number depicted on earlier maps and still recalled in folk memory. None of them are known to be of any great age. Earthworks of Trehowell cottages survive in pasture to the south-east of the church and a group of small closes north and east of the church point to other properties. Three hundred metres to the east beside Nant Logyn is Twyn-y-felin, thought to be on the site of one of the water mills that were established around the margins of the Great Forest of Brecknock by the 14th century.



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