

Garthbrenny

SO 045335
2563

Introduction

Garthbrenny is an isolated settlement comprising a church, a farm and a cottage. It is sited on high ground to the east of the Afon Honddu, 5km to the north of Brecon.

This brief report examines its emergence and development up to 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 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 may 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. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).



Garthbrenny church, photo 3247-0030 © CPAT, 2011

History of development

The early history of Garthbreny is obscure, though the sub-circular churchyard and perhaps the Garth element of the place-name (usually taken to mean an enclosure) may indicate an early medieval origin. Theophilus Jones, the 19th-century Brecknock antiquary, suggested that the name was formerly 'Gallt y bryn gu - the woody ascent to Mount Pleasant', but this seems most unlikely. Around 1180 it was referred to as *Garth bryngi brynn dewi* and a century later as *Carthprengy*. The standard translation of these forms would be the 'hill belonging to Brengi'.

The settlement now comprises a church and two houses, though the medieval, or early post-medieval, village appears to have been somewhat larger.

The heritage to 1750

St David's Church (2962) was heavily restored during the 19th century and its origins are uncertain, although parts of it have been claimed, without substantiation, as 12th century, perhaps because there is a stoup supposedly of that date within the church. The present building comprises a separated nave and chancel and a massive (possible 17th-century) west tower with a pyramidal roof.

The church is set in a raised, sub-circular, churchyard (2963) perhaps originally 60m in diameter, which has been extended on the north. The present circuit is defined by a stone retaining wall. The northern extension is walled and appears to be of some antiquity (it is shown on the tithe survey of 1841), but the line of the former churchyard is still clearly visible, surmounted by yew trees. Also the church appears to be set on a slight circular platform about 50m in diameter the edge of which is marked by mature yew trees. This platform may be a former smaller churchyard (2964) although the difference in areas between the 'old' and the 'new' is relatively small.

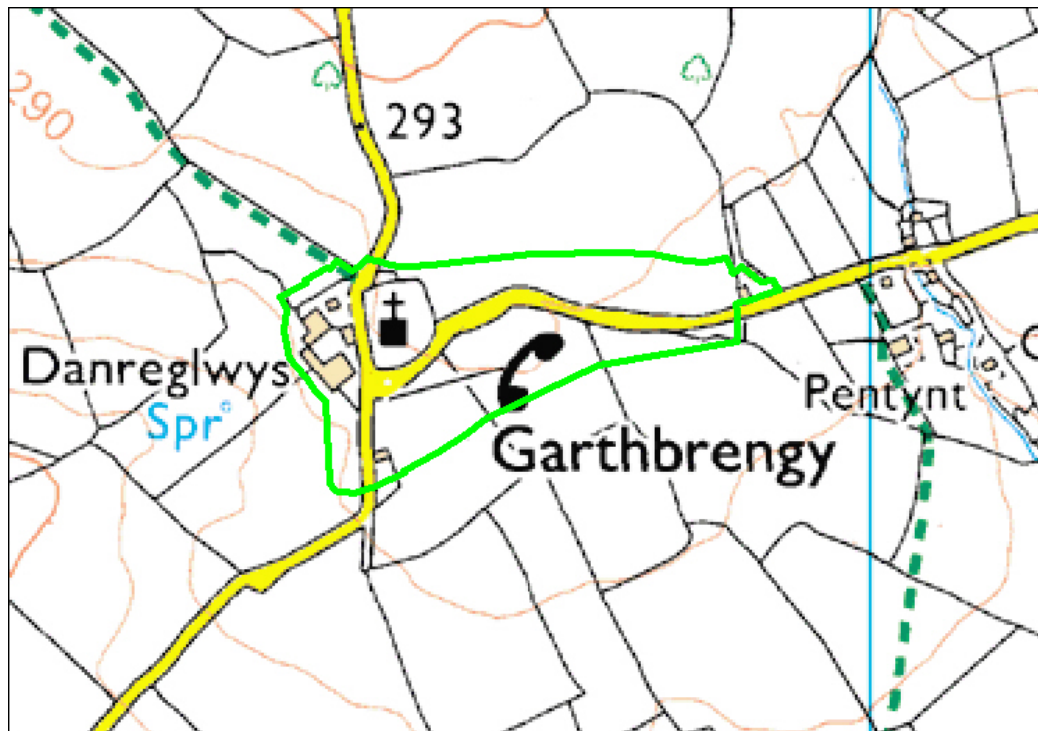
The only surviving domestic building in the village is Dan yr Eglwys farmhouse (2965), which is perhaps of 18th-century date.

There is, however, clear evidence that the settlement was formerly larger than at present. A group of four building platforms and connecting banks (5524) lie in the field immediately to the south of the church, and represent a now deserted part of the larger medieval settlement. A trackway (2541) runs westwards from these earthworks into adjacent fields. The field to the east is devoid of surface signs of habitation. However, it too may have contained buildings at one time as the tithe map from the mid-19th century survey shows an apparently blind access road protruding into this field which may have served dwellings in it. The next field to the east appears to have an isolated building platform (6702) within it.

Areas of ridge and furrow cultivation (5521) survive in the fields to the north of the church. A small earth and stone mound (6781) lies to the north-east of the village, outside the historic core. Though probably a prehistoric burial feature unrelated to the present settlement, it is well placed to be a medieval windmill mound.

It should also be noted here that a dozen long thin parallel fields, half of which still survive, are shown on the tithe survey surrounding the neighbouring hamlet of Llechach (now called Pentynt). These are the remains of medieval strip fields (2966), lying on the eastern edge of medieval Garthbreny and could have been an open field system for the settlement. There are the fossilised remains of another open-field system 200m or so the south-east of the church.

In summary Garthbreny gives the appearance of being a small church-settlement, but there is archaeological evidence to indicate that there was a nucleated settlement here in the medieval era. Its size and extent is unknown, as is its relationship with the open-field system around Pentynt to the east.



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