

Llanddew

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Introduction

Llanddew is a small and reasonably compact village focused on a church and castle at the junction of a number of minor roads to the north of Brecon. It is sited on a slight saddle of land on the eastern side of the Honddu valley, some 2km to the north-east of the county town.

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).



Llanddew village, photo 05-C-0123 © CPAT 2011

History of development

Although there is no direct evidence (and the significance of its cruciform shape in this context is questionable), it is generally assumed that the church at Llanddew originated as a clas foundation in the early medieval era and was a mother church for the surrounding region. Tradition has it that Aled (also called Eluned), daughter of Brychan, took refuge in Llanddew

church in AD 500, which would be in keeping with a *clas* origin. However, the earliest reference to the place comes from the period 1150 to 1175 when it was termed *Llando*, meaning 'church of God'. By 1249 this had been transmuted to *Llandew*.

The bishop's palace, immediately to the north-east of the churchyard was built during the 12th century, its most famous inhabitant being Giraldus Cambrensis who, as archdeacon of Brecon, occupied it from 1175 to 1203. The manor of Llandew in the hands of the bishop of St Davids was granted a weekly market by Edward I in 1290-1, and this appears to confirm the importance of the settlement which was probably more extensive during the medieval period than in later centuries until the emergence of new settlement growth during the 20th century.

The heritage to 1750

St David's Church (20151) is a large cruciform-shaped building with a central tower. Parts of the tower and chancel date from the 13th century, although most of the surviving church is the result of 15th-century and 16th-century rebuilding and also 19th-century refurbishment. Two carved lintel stones (2598 and 2597), of 12th-century Romanesque date, are amongst the earliest elements in the church, though neither is in its original position, but even earlier is a stone decorated with an incised cross and fragmented inscription (484) in the vestry. This 8th- or 9th-century stone was found built into the wall of the south transept during the 19th-century restoration.

The surrounding churchyard (2663) retains a basic oval plan despite being encroached upon, on the south and east. Even allowing for the fact that both Ty Gwyn and Church House appear to have been built inside the early churchyard, the present boundaries of the site suggest an original enclosure no more than 65m across which is small when compared with some other *clas* enclosures in mid-Wales, and is unlikely to reflect the size of the *clas* assuming it to have existed.



Llandew church, photo 1940-0016 © CPAT 2011

Llanddew castle was built by the bishops of St Davids as a fortified residence, presumably though probably not exclusively for the archdeacons of Brecon. A stone building is thought to have existed on the site even before Geraldus Cambrensis became archdeacon in 1175. The original palace appears to have been rebuilt, perhaps during the 1340s, by Archbishop Gower who extensively remodelled the bishop's palaces at St David's and Lamphey. It did not survive the Dissolution and was described as a 'ruine' by Leland in the period 1536-1543. Parts of a large rectangular building, probably a hall, and surrounding curtain walls (including a semi-circular bastion) do survive today. Much of the original plan has been lost to 19th-century construction and landscaping and may now be difficult to recover. Recording work commissioned by Cadw in 2003 has been reported on, but only in a cursory fashion.

An elaborate well (2664), traditionally ascribed to Archbishop Gower in the 14th century, is encompassed in an arched recess in the south-west curtain wall. It was designed to allow access to water from both inside and outside the fortified residence, although the internal access is now blocked. The well is now fronted by a fine 19th-century cast-iron hand pump (2665).

The modern village looks largely to have retained its medieval plan, with the main street running south-east from the castle and the church. The 1841 tithe map shows a small open triangular area, still surviving as a garden plot between the castle, the church and Tyisha and this might have been the site of the 13th-century market (2667). There has been much modern re-development within the proposed older core of the village and few early buildings remain. Few undeveloped plots now survive on this street frontage.

Its historic buildings include Ty Gwyn (2671) against the southern side of the churchyard, Llanddew Court (6948), a long house derivative, and Tyisha (2672), probably of 17th-century origin though recently modernised. Both the latter are outliers on the edge of the historic core, and all are post-medieval, the only domestic buildings of any age surviving in the village.

West of the church and adjacent to the churchyard, scheduled earthworks (2666) comprise the remains of three ponds, probably medieval fishponds, and at least one associated house platform. Ponds are occasionally associated with ecclesiastical sites, and it seems likely that these served the bishop's palace. On the opposite (south-eastern) side of the road, a number of possible house platforms (2668) are visible, although poorly defined. Evaluation followed by excavation here in 2005 identified successive dwellings, the earlier with an attached outbuilding, probably spanning the 12th-15th centuries, and with the pottery of 12th-century date being unusually early for a rural village context.

Further house platforms lie back from the lane that runs south-eastwards from the village centre to Llanddew Court and were evaluated in 2003 when drystone building foundations were found on them.

New housing to the north-east of the castle occupies a 'greenfield' site but fortunately, has probably not destroyed significant archaeological material. Indeed it is probable that the lane coming in from the north-east is of relatively modern origin and that the original approach to the settlement from the north-east was along the fine holloway that runs past Llanddew Court.

In summary the main areas of medieval settlement look to have been along routes running south-westwards and south-eastwards from the centre, and to a lesser degree perhaps to the north-west.

An extensive earthwork field system (5580) and a substantial holloway occupy the field between the centre of the village and Llanddew Court. These are the remains of a medieval strip-field system and of some importance. Further field system earthworks (2669) are visible west of Tyisha which lies to the north-west of the church. A number of banks again delimit strip fields. Isolated patches of ridge and furrow (2670) can be seen to the north of the settlement. Collectively these are remnants of the open fields that surrounded the settlement at Llanddew. Standell to the south of the village had fossilised strips beside it in the mid-19th century, and the predominant axes of the modern fields to the south-west of the village also point to fossilised open fields.



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