

Llangammarch Wells

SN 935474
2582

Introduction

Llangammarch Wells is a sprawling linear settlement spanning the River Irfon at its confluence with the Afon Cammarch, below the north-western slopes of Mynydd Epynt.

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).



Llangammarch Wells church, photo 95-C-0631 © CPAT 2011

History of development

The early history of Llangammarch Wells is sketchy, but it is likely that there has been a church here since the early medieval period. The present church is dedicated to a supposed St Cammarch, a grandson of Brychan a legendary king of Brecheiniog, and the earliest ecclesiastical establishment here, perhaps with a 6th-century foundation date, may have been a *clas* community, although the evidence for this is far from conclusive. There is, however, no

evidence that St Cammarch ever existed, and another authority believes that the church was originally dedicated to St Tysilio, as the poet Cynddelw (c.1155-1200) attributed the church to him in his *Cân Tysilio* (song to Tysilio).

It is first referred to as *Langamarch* in 1249, although there is a 12th-century mention of *llan gamarch* copied into a later source. The meaning is the obvious one of 'the church by the river Camarch'. The doubling of the 'm' in the name is an Anglicisation, while the addition of 'Wells' results from its development as a spa in recent centuries.

It seems probable that there was a settlement here in the medieval period, lying between the Rivers Irfon and Cammarch and centred on the church, although no buildings survive from this date. The exact extent of this medieval settlement is not known, but may be reflected by the tithe survey of 1843, which shows six buildings around the southern side of the churchyard.

During the 19th century Llangammarch held an annual horse fair, though it is not known whether this is a medieval survival or a later innovation.

The modern village, to the south of the Irfon, is largely a modern creation and owes its existence, at least to some degree, to the discovery of barium chloride wells in the area at the end of 18th century. The exploitation of these was masterminded by Theophilus Evans, the vicar of Llangammarch and the 'creator' of neighbouring Llanwrtyd Wells. The spa survived into the 20th century, when changing fashion forced its decline, and although relatively successful it never seriously rivalled its neighbour. At its height the spa was exporting bottled water by rail all over Britain and marketing its own branded cigarettes, while the village boasted a pump room, three hotels, and a golf course.

The heritage to 1750

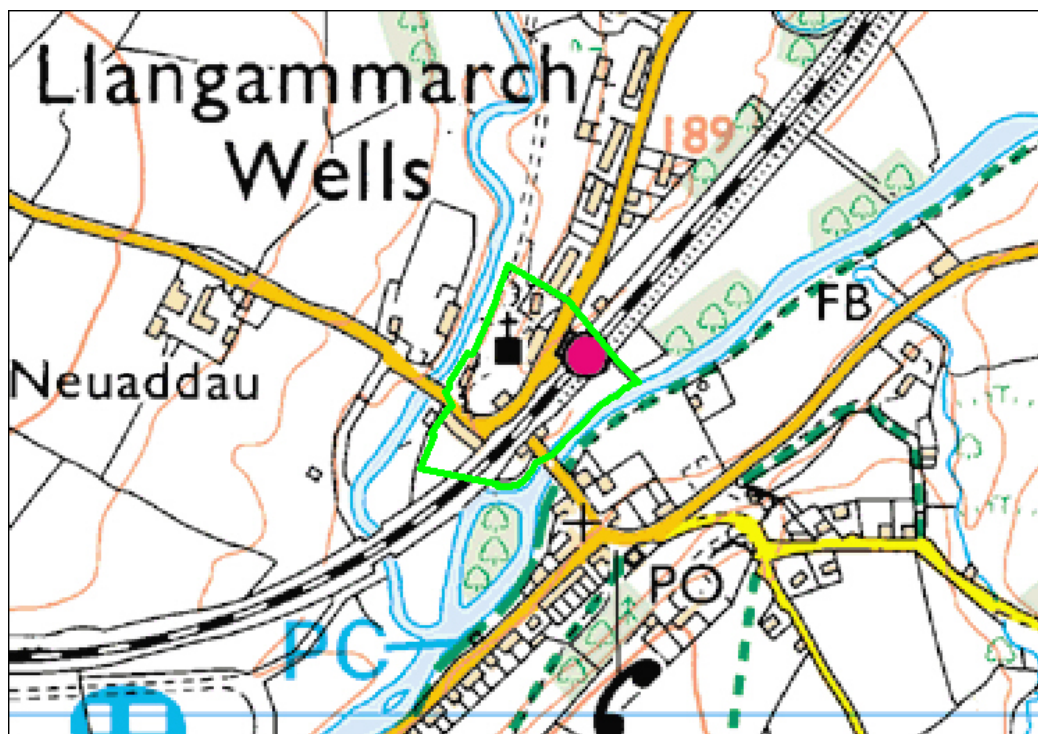
A Roman coin hoard (854) was found in peaty ground close to the station in 1871; while this might signify some local activity in the area, there is nothing as yet to suggest a Roman settlement here.

St Cammarch's Church (20134) is an entirely modern structure, having been re-built in 1915-6 by W. D. Caroe, and the tower was added in 1927. This building replaced an earlier church of 1850, which was in a different sector of the churchyard, and in turn this had replaced a medieval building, the construction date of which is unknown but which was ruinous by 1800. Though there is no direct evidence for the church's early medieval beginnings, a cross-carved stone (3046), built into the porch of the present building, belongs to the 9th or 10th century, and almost certainly was associated with the early foundation on this site.

The church is sited in a wedge-shaped churchyard (2674), on the end of an interfluvial spur at the confluence of the Cammarch and Irfon rivers. The earlier churchyard was more an elongated oval shape, and its western edge is marked by the modern path leading past the doorway of the 20th-century church.

A medieval holy well (3414), Ffynnon Gadferth, was recorded by the late 17th-century antiquary Edward Lhuyd in the parish. Although its site has not been precisely located, Lhuyd's vague description suggests it was outside the village.

No other evidence for medieval settlement survives at Llangammarch, although it seems plausible to assume that one developed at the river confluence. Slight earthworks (2675) are visible to the west of the village and these may represent some form of field system for the village, though they could easily post-date the medieval era. Also undated is an area of possible ridge and furrow cultivation (2655) surviving to the east of the village.



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