

Llan-y-wern

SO 102286
2591

Introduction

Llan-y-wern is a small linear settlement straddling a minor road. It is sited above the northern fringe of the Usk valley some 5km to the east of Brecon and 2 to 3km north-west of Llangorse Lake.

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).

History of development

There is a tradition that the first church here was founded in the 6th century. The oval churchyard strengthens the contention for an early medieval origin for the church if not for the rest of the settlement.

The earliest reference to it seems to be around 1100 AD when it was termed *Landwern altera costinio*. This could mean a 'place where alder trees grow' but in the present context probably carried the meaning of 'church near a marsh'. An important reference from c.1566 – *ll. y wern mair a chynydr* – allows us to postulate an earlier, pre-Marian dedication (see below). And Theophilus Jones, the early 19th-century Brecknock antiquary claimed that this was the *Monkton* that appeared in documents in the 1520s, an idea formulated because it belonged to Brecon Priory.

The settlement's archaeology has some English rather than Welsh characteristics, reflecting its development in the Anglo-Norman portion of the region during the Middle Ages, but relatively little is known about its growth.

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Mary (20164) is a simple, single-celled 14th-century building; there was some rebuilding in the 17th century, but relatively little restoration in the 19th century. It retains a bare stone-flagged interior, and apart from some 18th-century monuments, the only furnishing of any age is the font which is probably 13th-century. Traditionally the first foundation here was in the 6th century and was dedicated to St Cynidr, the present dedication only appearing in the 12th century. The church, so it is said, was formerly a chapel maintained by St John's Priory in Brecon.

The church stands in a largely oval, slightly raised, walled churchyard up to 40m across (2934), the shape, if not the fabric, of which may be early medieval. The straight south-western side is anomalous and is redolent of a later modification.

The tithe map of 1844 reveals that the churchyard fronted on to an open tract of ground on the south-west (2935). Elongated with the other buildings in the settlement around it, this was enclosed, common land, which had already been encroached on by the mid-19th century. Most of this common was reputedly turned into a village pond in the 1960s, but today survives only as a boggy hollow.

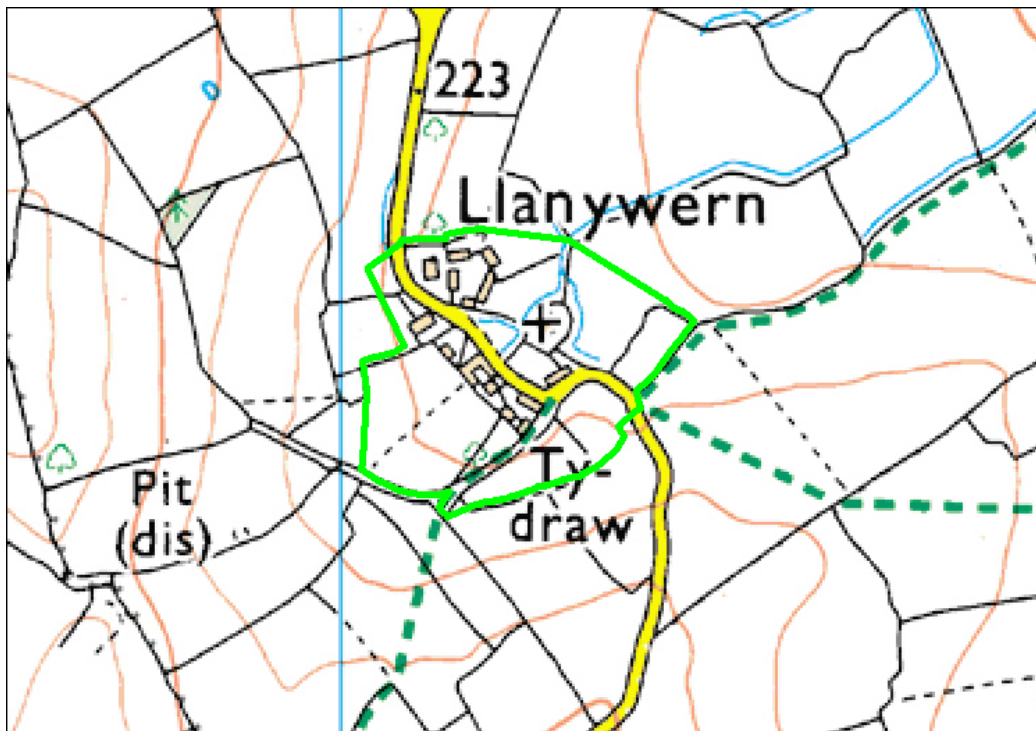
The oldest surviving domestic building in the village is Ty Mawr (31104) which appears to be a 16th or 17th-century stone longhouse, later remodelled. Other buildings are generally no earlier than the 19th century.

An area of earthworks can be identified to the south (6774) of the church. There may be a platform for a structure here which could represent an area of deserted medieval settlement. Other potential house sites have been identified in the past to the south and west of the church but none has yet been properly authenticated. Earthworks (6779) to the east of the church are believed to be water meadows and as such may be 19th-century in date.

A possible moated site (5593) has been recorded to the north of the church. However, local enquiry indicates that what had appeared to be a partly stone-revetted platform surrounded by a water-filled ditch is in fact a squared-off modern spoil-heap, resulting from the creation of the village pond (see above), dumped against an existing wall in an area of bog. It is possible that further medieval settlement may have existed in the area between this apparently fictitious moat and the church but no trace now survives. The area is now occupied by a modern bungalow and by a scrap yard.

Areas of ridge and furrow cultivation survive to the north (5594; 5595), west (5596) and south-east (5597) of the village, and fossilised open fields showing as strips lie some 200m to the south-west of the church. Some if not all of these reflect a medieval or later field system for the settlement.

In summary Llan-y-wern has in the past been considered as a nucleated settlement reflecting Anglo-Norman concepts of development. Until some of the putative house sites are authenticated, it is perhaps more reasonable to see it as a church settlement that developed beside a small common in a relatively low-lying and damp position, with a farm emerging at one end. Nucleation has yet to be confirmed.



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