

Lower Chapel

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Introduction

Lower Chapel is a small, nucleated, valley-floor settlement, surrounding its church. Sited on the east bank of the Afon Honddu, and straddling the B4520 Builth Wells to Brecon road, it is some 7km 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).



Lower Chapel churchyard, photo 3247-0026 © CPAT 2011

History of development

The history of Lower Chapel, as with its close neighbour Upper Chapel, is largely unrecorded. The settlement stands within the parish of Llandefaelog Fach to which it was a chapel-of-ease, although there have been suggestions that it once had its own parish. There

appears to be a consensus that there could have been a medieval chapel at Lower Chapel, though no incontrovertible evidence to prove it.

Llanfihangel Fechan was referred to as *parochia Sancti Michaelis Parvi* in 1503, Llanvihangell in the *Valor* of 1535, and *Llanyhangle uachan* in 1578, meaning 'little Llanfihangel'. In 1798 came the most telling evidence with a reference to *Llanvihangel Vechan or Lower Chapel*.

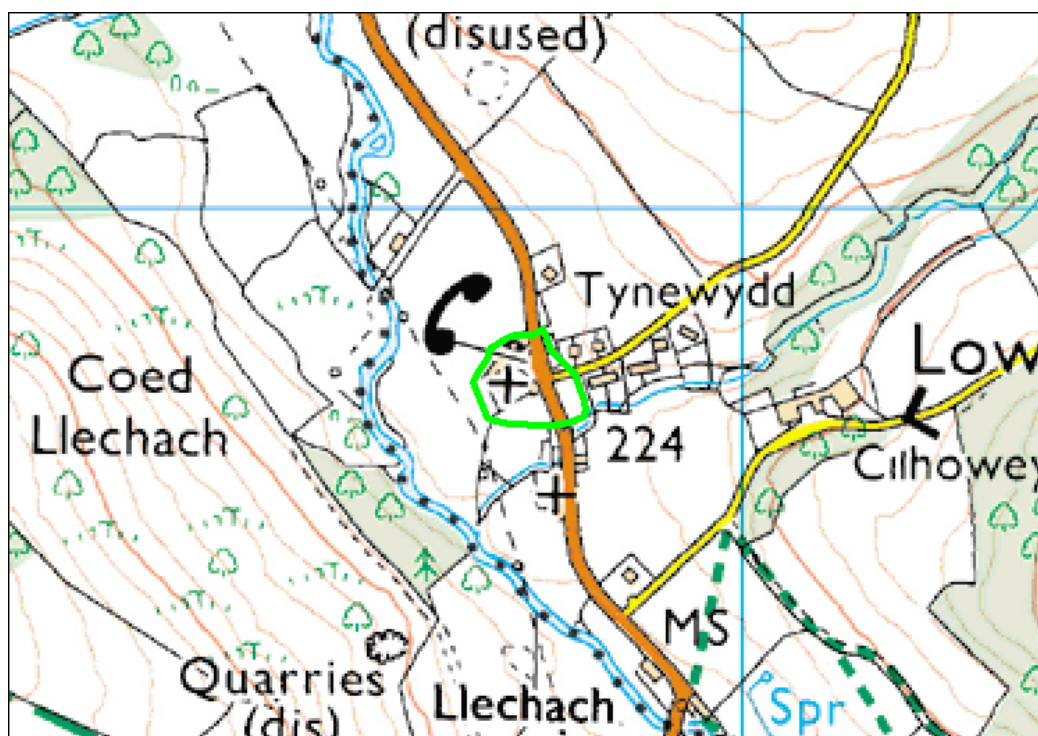
The heritage to 1750

St Michael's Church (2660) is said, by one authority, to have been recorded as being founded in about 1790, and re-built by Thomas Nicholson in 1863/4. The present building is single-celled with north and south aisles and an apsidal east end. While the fabric is entirely modern the effect is markedly Romanesque and it may be that the re-build reflects an original plan. The apsidal east end and the proliferation of elaborately reproduced dog-tooth moulding is presumably a product of 19th-century architectural fashion. This then begs the question as to where was the predecessor which is clearly indicated in the earlier place names? In the absence of an alternative site, it might be wondered whether the authority cited above was incorrect.

The church may have lain in a sub-circular churchyard, which has been internally reduced to produce the present small square enclosure, although this is by no means certain. Vague earthworks are just visible on the east and south of the present yard and they may outline a former enclosure (2662).

There are no other buildings of any age known in the village.

In summary, there is a reasonable chance that a chapel was established here in the Honddu valley in the Middle Ages. As to whether it attracted settlement around it before the 17th century is unknown.



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